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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

AUTHOR OF "THE TRAGEDY OF POMPEY THE GREAT," "MULTITUDE AND SOLITUDE," "LOST ENDEAVOUR," "CAPTAIN MARGARET," "THE TRAGEDY OF NAN," ETC.

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THIS book is written partly for the use of people who are reading Shakespeare, and partly to encourage the study of the plays. Though the plays are the greatest things ever made by the English mind it cannot be said that the English reverence their poet. There is no theatre in London set apart for the performance of Shakespeare. There is no theatre in London built for the right production of Shakespeare. There are not in the empire enough lovers of Shakespeare, or of the poetical drama, or of poetry, to take the British stage from the hands of ground landlords, and make it again glorious with the vision of the pageant of man. These are sad things; for art is the life. Art is the thought of men with vision. When art is scorned it is a sign that the men without vision are in power. "Where there is no vision the people perish."

Worldly Empire has always been gluttonous and foolish. It has always been a monstrous sentimental bubble blown out of something dead that was once grand. Man's true empire is not

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in continents nor over the sea, but within himself, in his own soul. Here in London, where a worldly empire is controlled, there exists no theatre in which the millions can see that other empire. They pass from one grey street to another grey street, to add up figures, or to swallow patent medicines, with no thought that life has been lived nobly, and burningly, and knightly, for great ends, and in great passions, as the vision of our great mind declares.

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

STRATFORD-ON-AVON is cleaner, better paved, and perhaps more populous than it was in Shakespeare's time. Several streets of mean red-brick houses have been built during the last half century. Hotels, tea rooms, refreshment rooms, and the shops where the tripper may buy things to remind him that he has been where greatness lived, give the place an air at once prosperous and parasitic. The town contains a few comely old buildings. The Shakespeare house, a detached double dwelling, once the home of the poet's father, stands on the north side of Henley Street. A room on the first floor, at the western end, is shown to visitors as the room

in which the poet was born. There is not the slightest evidence to show that he was born there. One scanty scrap of fact exists to suggest that he was born at the eastern end. The two dwellings have now been converted into one, which serves as a museum. New Place, the house where Shakespeare died, was pulled down in the middle of the eighteenth century. For one museum the less let us be duly thankful.

The church in which Shakespeare, his wife, and little son are buried stands near the river. It is a beautiful building of a type common in the Cotswold country. It is rather larger and rather more profusely carved than most. Damp, or some mildness in the stone, has given much of the ornament a weathered look. Shakespeare is buried seventeen feet down near the north wall of the chancel. His wife is buried in another grave a few feet from him.

The country about Stratford is uninteresting, pretty, and well watered. A few miles away the Cotswold hills rise. They have a

bold beauty, very pleasant after the flatness of the plain. The wolds towards Stratford grow many oaks and beeches. Farther east, they are wilder and barer. Little brooks spring up among the hills. The nooks and valleys are planted with orchards. Old, grey Cotswold farmhouses, and little, grey, lovely Cotswold villages show that in Shakespeare's time the country was prosperous and alive. It was sheep country then. The wolds were sheep walks. Life took thought for Shakespeare. She bred him, mind and bone, in a two-fold district of hill and valley, where country life was at its best and the beauty of England at its bravest. Afterwards she placed him where there was the most and the best life of his time. Work so calm as his can only have come from a happy nature, happily fated. Life made a golden day for her golden soul. The English blessed by that soul have raised no theatre for the playing of the soul's thanksgiving.

Legends about Shakespeare began to spring up in Stratford as soon as there was a demand

for them. Legends are a stupid man's excuse for his want of understanding. They are not evidence. Setting aside the legends, the lies, the surmises and the imputations, several uninteresting things are certainly known about him.

We know that he was the first son and third child of John Shakespeare, a country trader settled at Stratford, and of Mary his wife; that he was baptised on the 26th April, 1564; and that in 1582 he got with child a woman named Anne or Agnes Hathaway, eight years older than himself. Her relatives saw to it that he married her. A daughter (Susanna) was born to him in May 1583, less than six months after the marriage. In January 1585 twins were born to him, a son (Hamnet, who died in 1596) and a daughter (Judith).

At this point he disappears. Legend, written down from a hundred to a hundred and sixty years after the event, says that he was driven out of the country for poaching, that he was a country school-master, that he made

a "very bitter" ballad upon a landlord, that he tramped to London, that he held horses outside the theatre doors, and that at last he was received into a theatrical company "in a very mean rank." This is all legend, not evidence. That he was a lawyer's clerk, a soldier in the Low Countries, a seaman, or a printer, as some have written books to attempt to show, is not evidence, nor legend, but wild surmise. It might be urged, with as great likelihood, that he became a king, an ancient Roman, a tapster or a brothel keeper.

It is fairly certain that the company which first received him was the Earl of Leicester's company, then performing at The Theatre in Shoreditch. The company changed its patron and its theatre several times, but Shakespeare, having been admitted to it, stayed with it throughout his theatrical career. He acted with it at The Theatre, at the Rose and Globe Theatres, at the Court, at the Inns of Court, and possibly on many stages in the provinces. For many years he pro-

fessed the quality of actor. Legend says that he acted well in what are called "character parts." Soon after his entrance into the profession he began to show a talent for improving the plays of others.

Nothing interesting is known of his subsequent life, except that he wrote great poetry and made money by it. It is plain that he was a shrewd, careful, and capable man of affairs, and that he cared, as all wise men care, for rank and an honourable state. He strove with a noble industry to obtain these and succeeded. He prospered, he bought New Place at Stratford, he invested in land, in theatre shares and in houses. During the last few years of his life he retired to New Place, where he led the life of a country gentleman. He died there on the 23rd April, 1616, aged fifty-two years. The cause of his death is not known. His wife and daughters survived him.

Little is known of his human relationships. He is described as "gentle." Had he been not gentle we should know more of him.

Ben Johnson "loved the man," and says that "he was, indeed, honest and of an open and free nature." John Webster speaks of his "right happy and copious industry." An actor who wrote more than thirty plays during twenty years of rehearsing, acting, and theatre management, can have had little time for mixing with the world.

That we know little of his human relationships is one of the blessed facts about him. That we conjecture much is the penalty a nation pays for failing to know her genius when he appears.

Three portraits—a bust, an engraving, and a painting—have some claim to be considered as genuine portraits of Shakespeare. The first of these is the coloured half-length bust on the chancel wall in Stratford Church. This was made by one Gerard Janssen, a stonemason of some repute. It was placed in the church within seven years of the poet's death. It is a crude work of art; but it shows plainly that the artist had before him (in vision or in the flesh) a man of unusual

vivacity of mind. The face is that of an aloof and sunny spirit, full of energy and effectiveness. Another portrait is that engraved for the title page of the first folio, published in 1623. The engraving is by Martin Droeshout, who was fifteen years old when Shakespeare died, and (perhaps) about twenty-two when he made the engraving. It is a crude work of art, but it shows plainly that the artist had before him the representation of an unusual man.

It is possible that the representation from which he engraved his plate was a painting on panel, now at Stratford. This painting (discovered in 1840) is now called "the Droeshout portrait." It is supposed to represent the Shakespeare of the year 1609. In the absence of proof, all that can be said of it is that it is certainly a work of the early seventeenth century, and that it looks as though it were the original of the engraving. No other "portrait of Shakespeare" has any claim to be considered as even a doubtful likeness.

There are, unfortunately, many graven images of Shakespeare. They are perhaps passable portraits of the languid, half-witted, hydrocephalic creatures who made them. As representations of a bustling, brilliant, profound, vivacious being, alive to the finger tips, and quick with an energy never since granted to man, they are as false as water.

CHAPTER II

THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRES

THE Elizabethan theatres were square, circular, or octagonal structures, built of wood, lath and plaster, on stone or brick foundations. They stood about forty or forty-five feet high. They were built with three storeys, tiers, or galleries of seats which ran round three sides of the stage and part of the fourth. On the fourth side, at the back of the stage, was a tiring house in which the actors robed. The upper storeys of the tiring house could be used in the action, for a balcony, the upper storeys of a house, etc., according to the needs of the scene. It is possible, but not certain, that the tiring house itself was used in some plays to represent an inner chamber. The three storeys of seats were divided by partitions into

"gentlemen's roomes" and "Twoe pennie roomes." The top storey was roofed in, either with thatch or tiles. The stage was roofed over in the same way. The space or yard between the stage and the galleries which surrounded it, was open to the sky. It contained no seats, but it held many spectators who stood. "Standing room" cost a penny. Those who stood could press right up to the stage, which was a platform four or five feet high projecting well out from the back of the house "to the middle of the yarde." It was possible to see the actors "in the round," instead of, as at present, like people in a picture. The audience got their emotions from the thing done and the thing said; not, as with us, from the situation. It was the custom of gallant gentlemen to hire stools placed on the stage itself. They sat and took tobacco there during the performance. Rank had then a greater privilege of impertinence than it has to-day. The performances took place by daylight. They were announced by the blowing of a trumpet.

During a performance, a banner was hung from the theatre roof. The plays were played straight through, without waits. The only waits necessary in a theatre are (*a*) those which rest the actors and (*b*) those which give variety to the moods of the spectators. The double construction of Shakespeare's plays provided a sub-plot which held or amused the audience while the actors of the main plot rested. It is possible, but not certain, that the scenes were played on alternate halves of the stage, and that when one half of the stage was being cleared of its properties, or fitted with them, the play continued on the other half. It is not possible to speak of the general quality of the acting. Acting, like other dependent art, can only be good when it has good art to interpret. The acting was probably as good and as bad as the plays. Careful and impressive speaking and thoughtful, restrained gesture were qualities which Shakespeare and Ben Jonson praised. It is likely that the acting of the time was much quicker than modern acting. The plays were

played very swiftly, without hesitation or dawdling over "business."

There was little or no scenery to most plays. The properties, *i.e.* chairs, beds, etc., were simple and few. The play was the thing. The aim of the play was to give not a picture of life, but a glorified vision of life. The object was not realism but illusion. The costumes were of great splendour. In some productions (as in *Henry VIII*) they were of an excessive splendour. Music and singing added much to the beauty of many scenes.

Women were not then allowed upon the stage. Women's parts were played by boys. Some have thought that this must have taken from the excellence of the performances. It is highly likely that it added much to it. Nearly all boys can act extremely well. Very few men and women can.

The playing of women's parts by boys may have limited Shakespeare's art. His women are kept within the range of thought and emotion likely to be understood by boys.

This may account for their wholesome, animal robustness. There is no trace of the modern heroine, the common woman overstrained, or the idle woman in her megrims, in any Shakespearean play. The people of the plays are alive and hearty. They lead a vigorous life and go to bed tired. They never forget that they are animals. They never let any one else forget that they are also divine.

CHAPTER III

THE PLAYS

THREE plays belong to Shakespeare's first period of original creative writing. It is fair to suppose that the least dramatically sound of the three was the one first written. We therefore take *Love's Labour's Lost* as his first play. It is commonly said by critics that *Love's Labour's Lost* is "the work of a young man." It might more justly be said of it that it is the work of a new kind of young man. The young man knows all the trick of the theatre and uses it, as a master always uses technique, for the statement of something new to the human soul. The play no longer speaks to the human soul; for though it is the work of a master, it is the work of a master not yet alive to the depths and still doubtful among the temptations to which

intellect is subject. It is one of those works of art which remind us of Blake's saying, that "the best water is the newest." When it came out, with all the glitter of newness on it, the mind of man was flattered by a new possession. To us, the persons of the play are not much more than Time's toys, who never really lived, but only glittered a little.

Love's Labour's Lost.

Written. Between 1589 and 1592.

Published, after correction and augmentation, from a badly corrected copy, 1598.

Source of the Plot. It is thought that Shakespeare created the plot. The names of some of the characters were taken from people then living. The incident in Act V, scene ii (the entrance of the King of Navarre and his men, in Russian habits), was perhaps suggested by the visit of some Russians to Queen Elizabeth in 1584.

The Fable. The King of Navarre and his three courtiers, Biron, Dumaine and Longaville, have sworn to study for three years under the usual collegiate conditions of watching, fasting, and keeping from the sight and speech of women. They are forced to break this vow. The Princess of France comes with her Court to discuss State affairs.

At the discussion, the King falls in love with the Princess, his three courtiers fall in love with the ladies of her train.

The lovers send vows of love to their ladies. They plot to visit them in disguises of masks and Russian clothes.

The ladies, hearing of this plot in time, mask themselves. The men fail to recognize them. Each disguised lover makes love-vows to the wrong woman.

The ladies twit the men with a double perjury: that they have broken their vow to study, and their love vows.

The play is kept within the bounds of fantastic comedy by the members of the sub-plot, who intrude with their fun whenever the action tends to become real. They intrude here, to impersonate the Nine Worthies before the two Courts. The farce of their performance is heightened by ragging from the courtiers. When it is at its height, two of the members of the sub-plot begin to quarrel. One blow would ruin the play by making it real. At the crisis the violence is avoided; the reality is brought unexpectedly, by beauty. A messenger enters to tell the Princess that her father is dead.

The ladies bid the men test their love by waiting for twelve months. The trifling of the earlier acts is shown at its moral value against a background of tragic happening. Accomplishments are compared with life.

The members of the sub-plot enter. They end the play with the singing of a lyric.

The play gives the reader the uncanny feeling that something real inside the piece is trying to get out of the fantasy. The lip-love rattles like a skeleton's bones. The love of Biron for Rosaline is real passion. The conflict throughout is the conflict of the unreal with the real.

The play seems to have been written in a literary or sentimental mood, and revised

in a real mood. There is little in the early version that is not fantastic. The situation is fantastic, the people are fantastic, the language is fantastic with all a brilliant young master's delight in the play and glitter of cunning writing. The later version was written during the passionate years of Shakespeare's growth, after something had altered the world to him. The two versions are carelessly stuck together, with the effect of a rose-bush growing out of bones.

The Biron scenes, as we have them, seem to be the fruit of the mood that caused the sonnets. We do not know what caused that mood. The sonnets, like the plays, are as likely to be symbol as confession. The sonnets suggest that he loved an unworthy woman who robbed him of a beloved friend. *Love's Labour's Lost* and several other early plays suggest that he knew too well how love for the unworthy woman smirches honour, wakens, but holds captive, the reason, and wastes the spiritual gift in the praise of a form of death.

The dramatic method is dual. He presents in the plot something eternal in human life, and in the sub-plot something temporal in human fashion. In the plot of this play, his intention seems to have been this — to show intellect turned from a high resolve, from a consecration to mental labour, by the coming of women, who represent, perhaps, untutored, natural intelligence. Later in the play the high resolve of intellect is betrayed again, indirectly by women; but more by the sexual emotions which distort the vision till even the falsest, loosest woman appears beautiful and "celestial," and worth the sacrifice of intellect. The end of the play is not so much an end as a clearing of the road of life.

It often happens that the setting down of a doubt in careful words resolves it. This play seems to free Shakespeare's mind from doubts as to the right use and preparation of intellect. He presents with extreme care the different types of literary intellect: the man who shuts himself up to study, the man who sparkles in society, the man whom

books have made stupid and the man whom style has made mad.

The play is full of the problem of what to do with the mind. Shall it be filled with study, or spent in society, or burnt in a passion, or tortured by strivings for style, or left as it is? Intellect is a problem to itself. Something of the problem seems (it would be wrong to be more certain) to have made this play not quite impersonal, as good art should be.

The problems are settled wisely, though not without a feeling of sacrifice. The beauty and the worth of learning are baits by which many intellects are lured from wisdom. The knowledge that life is the book to study, life at its liveliest, in the wits of women

> "Keen
> Above the sense of sense,"

and that style is a poor thing beside the "honest plain words" which pierce, only comes with a sense of loss. Youth desires all the powers. A man with great gifts

desires all the mental gifts. Youth with nothing but great gifts is never sure that the gifts will be sufficient. When this play was written, the stage was supplied with plays by men of trained intellects, who set more store upon the training than upon the intellect itself. The society of well-taught men, who know and quote and criticise, always makes the untaught uncertain and ill at ease. Shakespeare seems to have risen from the writing of this play, certain that poetry is not given to the trained mind, nor to the untrained mind, but to the quick and noble nature, earnest with the passion which stands the touchstone of death. "Subtlety," so Cromwell wrote, "may deceive you, integrity never will." The mind is her own armour. She will not fail for the want of a little learning or a little grace.

In the sub-plot, among much low comedy, this truth is emphasised by the triumph of Costard, a natural mind, in an encounter with Armado, an artificial mind. At the end of the play the "learned men" are made

to compile a dialogue "in praise of the owl and the cuckoo." The dialogue is of a kind not usual among learned men, but the choice of the birds is significant. The last speech of the play: "The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo," seems to refer to Marlowe, as though Shakespeare found it hard to justify an art so unlike his master's. Marlowe climbs the peaks in the sun, his bow never off his shoulders. I walk the roads of the earth among men.

There is little character drawing in the piece. The Princess is a gracious figure; but hardly real to us till the last scene of the play, when she speaks wisely. Biron is more of a person. He presents his point of view in a moment of pleasant poetry—

"For where is any author in the world,
Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?"

He shows a prejudice against Boyet, the courtier in attendance on the Princess. This prejudice is expressed bitterly—

"This is the flower that smiles on every one,"

with the bitterness usual in Shakespeare when treating of the flunkey mind. The ladies of the Princess's train all talk exactly alike, with sharp feminine wit, infinitely swift in thrust. None of them has personality; but Rosaline is described for us, body and disposition. The members of the sub-plot are mental fashions well observed. Costard alone has life. Shakespeare came from the country. In the country a thinking man is reminded daily of the shrewdness of unspoiled minds. Armado, Costard's opponent, lives for us by one phrase—

> "The sweet war-man is dead and rotten: sweet chucks, beat not the bones of the buried: when he breathed, he was a man."

It is interesting to see Shakespeare's mind trying for vividness. In his maturity he had supremely the power of giving life. In this early play one can see his first conscious literary efforts towards the obtaining of the power. Longaville (in Act II, sc. i) makes the scene alive by the question—

"I beseech you a word. What is she in the white?"

(Who is the woman in the white dress?) The simple but telling means of giving reality is repeated a few lines later in Biron's question —

"What's her name in the cap?"

In Act V, sc. ii, the vividness is given in a strangely pathetic passage, that haunts, after the play is laid down. Two of the ladies are talking of Cupid—

Rosaline. You'll ne'er be friends with him: he killed your sister.

Katharine. He made her melancholy, sad, and heavy;
And so she died: had she been light, like you,
Of such a merry, nimble, stirring spirit,
She might have been a granddam ere she died.

The power of giving life in a line is seen in the remark of Dumaine (Act IV, sc. iii)—

"To look like her, are chimney-sweepers black."

The play is full of experiments. (Some of it is written in a loose, swinging couplet, some in quatrains, some in blank verse, some in the choice, picked prose made the fashion by Lyly.) It contains more lyrics than any other Shakespearean play. One of the lyrics, a sonnet in Alexandrines, is the fruit of a real human passion. The lyric at the end of the play is the loveliest thing ever said about England. If this play and most of the other plays were modern works, the Censor would not allow them to be performed publicly. The men and women converse with a frankness and suggestiveness not now usual, except among the young. Shakespeare is blamed for not conforming to standards unknown to his generation.

He is blamed for not being delicate-minded like the great Greek tragic poets. The Greek tragic poets wrote about the heroic life of legend. Shakespeare wrote about life. A man who writes about life must accept life for what it is, as largely an animal thing. Those who pretend that life is only lived

in boudoirs, are in peril, and the world is in peril through them.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Written. Before 1592.

Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The story of a woman who follows her lover in the disguise of a page-boy, hears him serenade another woman, and acts as a go-between in his suit to this other woman, is to be found in the second book of *La Diana Enamorada,* a pastoral romance, in prose, freely sprinkled with lyrics, by Jorge de Montemayor, a Portuguese who wrote in Spanish about the middle of the sixteenth century. De Montemayor's story is not complicated by a Valentine. He calls the girl Felismena, her lover Felix, and the second woman Celia. His tale ends with Celia dying for love of the supposed page-boy.

A play based on this story was acted in England in 1584. It is now lost. The gist of the story was published in lame English verses, by Barnabe Googe in 1563.

The Fable. Valentine and Proteus, the two gentlemen, are friends. Valentine is about to travel. Proteus, in love with Julia, will not go with him. Antonio, Proteus' father, sends Proteus after Valentine. Julia resolves to follow him in boy's clothes. Valentine at Milan falls in love with the Duke's daughter, Silvia, whom the Duke plans to marry to one Thurio. Proteus, arriving at Milan, also falls in love with Silvia. He becomes jealous of Valentine.

Valentine tells him that he has planned to escape with Silvia that night. Proteus betrays this plot to the Duke. The Duke banishes Valentine and sends Proteus to Silvia to press the suit of Thurio.

Valentine joins a gang of outlaws.

Proteus woos Silvia for himself, and is rejected by her.

Julia, who has come in boy's dress from Verona to look for Proteus, finds him still unsuccessfully courting Silvia. She enters his service as a page. He sends her on a message to Silvia.

On her way to deliver the message, Julia meets Silvia flying from home in search of Valentine.

In her search for Valentine, Silvia is caught by the gang of outlaws.

Proteus rescues her, and threatens to resume his suit with violence.

Valentine, entering, stops this.

Proteus sues for pardon to Valentine and Julia. He is received to mercy. The Duke after dismissing Thurio pardons Valentine, and grants him Silvia's hand in marriage.

Love's Labour's Lost is fantasy. The *Two Gentlemen of Verona* deals with real human relationships. It is a better play than the fantasy, though the fantasy has moments of better poetry. It carries on one of the problems raised in *Love's Labour's Lost*. It is the work of a troubled mind. It comes from the mood in which the sonnets were written.

Twice in *Love's Labour's Lost* the act of oath-breaking, of being forsworn, is important to the play's structure. Though the vows broken in that play are fantastic, the characters feel real dishonour at the breaking

of them. The play shows that though the idea of vow-breaking was in Shakespeare's mind, he had not then the power, or the human experience, or the mental peace, to grapple with it fairly, or see it truly. The idea, that the person for whom the vows are broken brings with her the punishment of the sin of vow-breaking, haunts the mind of Biron (in Act IV, sc. iii)—

"Sow'd cockle reap'd no corn:
And justice always whirls in equal measure:
Light wenches may prove plagues to men forsworn."

In the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, this idea, the idea that treachery caused by some obsession is at the root of most tragedy, was treated by him at length, perhaps for the first time.

That it haunted him then, and remained all through his life as the pole-star of dramatic action is evident to all who read his works as poetry should be read. It is the law of his imagination.

Passion, not weakness of will, but strength

of will blinded, is the commonest cause of treachery among us. The great poets have agreed that anything that distorts the mental vision, anything thought of too much, is a danger to us. Passion that with the glimmer of a new drunkenness blinds the mature to the life and death memories of marriage, and kills in the immature the memory of love, friendship, and past benefits, is a form of destruction. In its action as a destroyer, it is the subject of Shakespeare's greatest plays. In the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* he is interested less in the destruction than in the moral blindness that leads to it.

Shakespeare's method is simple. He shows us two charming young men becoming morally blind with passion, in a company not so blinded. The only other "inconstant" person in the play (Sir Thurio) is inconstant from that water-like quality in the mind that floods with the full moon, and ebbs like a neap soon after. Even the members of the sub-plot, the two servants, are constant, the one to his master, who beats him, the other

to the dog that gets him beaten. A lesser mind would sit in judgment in such a play. The task of genius is not to sit in judgment.

"Our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together."

Shakespeare neither praises nor blames. His task is to see justly. It is we who conclude that treachery looks ugly beside its opposite.

Of the fine scenes in the play, sc. iv in Act II, where Valentine and Sir Thurio walk with Silvia, with whom they are both in love, is the liveliest. The two men bicker across the lady, as though the next word would bring blows. The demure pleasure of Silvia in being quarrelled for, is indicated most masterly in less than thirty words. Act III, sc. i, where the Duke discovers Valentine's plot to escape with Silvia, is a passage of noble dramatic power, doubly interesting because it shows the justice of Shakespeare's vision. Valentine, the constant friend and lover, is exposed in an act of treachery to his benefactor. The scenes in which the disguised

Julia witnesses her lover's falseness, and the scene in which the play is brought to an end, are deeply and nobly affecting. Theatre managers play Shakespeare as though he were an old fashion of the mind instead of the seer of the eternal in life. They should play this play as a vision of something that is eternally treacherous, bringing misery to the faithful, the noble, and the feeling. One of the noblest things in the play is the forgiveness at the end. Passion has taken Proteus into strange byways of treachery. He has been false to Julia, to Valentine, to the Duke, to Thurio, one falseness leading to another, till he is in a wood of the soul, tangled in sin. It only wants that he be false to Silvia, too. Passion makes his eyes a little blinder for an instant. He adds that treachery to the others. Power to see clearly is the only cure for passion. Discovery gives that power. Valentine's words—

"Who should be trusted now, when one's
right hand
Is perjured to the bosom? Proteus,

I am sorry I must never trust thee more,
But count the world a stranger for thy sake.
The private wound is deepest. . . ."

followed so soon by Julia's words—

"Behold her that gave aim to all thy oaths,
And entertained them deeply in her heart:
How oft hast thou with perjury cleft the root. . . .
It is the lesser blot, modesty finds,
Women to change their shapes, than men their minds"—

rouse Proteus to the confounding instant of self-recognition. His answer is like a voice from one of the later plays. It is in Shakespeare's grand manner. It does not read like a piece of revision done in the poet's maturity; but as though Shakespeare suddenly found his utterance in a moment of vision—

"Than men their minds! 'tis 'true. O heaven! Were man
But constant, he were perfect: that one error
Fills him with faults; makes him run through all the sins:
Inconstancy falls off, ere it begins."

A word of excuse would brand him as base. He is ashamed and guilty; but not base. He cannot say more than that he is sorry, and this only to Valentine. Valentine accepts sorrow with the utterance of one of the religious ideas which seem to have been constantly in Shakespeare's mind.

"By penitence the Eternal's wrath's appeased."

His conduct towards Proteus after this forgiveness is so wise with delicate tact that the reader is reminded of Shelley's treatment of Hogg, in a similar case.

The suggestion of the character of Silvia has an austere beauty. The two gentlemen are limited by the play's needs. The figure of Valentine is the more complete of the two. He is an interesting study of one of those grave young men who, when tested by life, show themselves wise beyond their years. Among the minor characters, that of Eglamour, an image of constancy to a dead woman, is the most beautiful. He is one of

the strange, many-sorrowed souls, vowed to an idea, to whom Shakespeare's characters so often turn when the world bears hard. The low comedy of Launce could hardly be lower; but his phrase "the other squirrel" (in Act IV, sc. iv) is a good stroke. The great mind is full of vitality on all the planes.

There is little superb verse in the play. The lyric, "Who is Silvia ? " shows a marvellous lyrical art, working without emotion to imitate an effect of music. The proverb, "make a virtue of necessity," occurs in Act IV, sc. ii. The fine lines—

"O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day"—

and the pretty speech of Julia in Act II, sc. vii—

"I'll be as patient as a gentle stream,
And make a pastime of each weary step,
Till the last step have brought me to my love;
And there I'll rest, as, after much turmoil,
A blessed soul doth in Elysium"—

are memorable.

Man is so eager to know about Shakespeare that he is tempted to find personal confession in the plays. It is true that the art of a young man is too immature to be impersonal. In an achieved style we see the man; in all striving for style we see what hurts him. But in poetry, human experience is wrought to symbol, and symbol is many virtued, according to the imaginative energy that broods upon it. It is said that Shakespeare holds a mirror up to life. He who looks into a mirror closely generally sees nothing but himself.

The Comedy of Errors

Written. Before 1594.

Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The plot was taken from the *Menechmi* of Plautus. Whether Shakespeare read the play in Latin, or in a translation, or heard it from a friend, or saw it acted, is not known. All four are possible.

The sub-plot, in this case a duplication of the plot, was suggested by a part of the *Amphitruo* of Plautus.

The play is brought on to the plane of human feeling by the character of Ægeon. This character was suggested by a story in *Gli Supposiți* (The Supposes) of Ariosto.

The Fable. Like all comedies of mistake, the *Comedy of Errors* has an extremely complicated plot. The play consists of a number of ingeniously contrived situations in which

either the Antipholus and the Dromio of Ephesus are mistaken for the Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, or those of Syracuse are mistaken for those of Ephesus. The comedy of mistake is touched with beauty by the romantic addition of the restoration of old Ægeon to his long-lost wife.

Poets are great or little according to the nobleness of their endeavour to build a mansion for the soul. Shakespeare, like other poets, grew by continual, very difficult mental labour, by the deliberate and prolonged exercise of every mental weapon, and by the resolve to do not "the nearest thing," precious to human sheep, but the difficult, new and noble thing, glimmering beyond his mind, and brought to glow there by toil. We do not know when the play was written, nor why it was written. If it were not written by special request, for reward, it must have been chosen either for the rest given by a subject external to the mind, or as a self-set exercise in the difficult mental labour of comic dramatic construction. Every playwright sees the comic opportunity of the *Menæchmi* fable. A playwright not yet sure of his art sees and

admires behind the comedy the firm, intricate mental outline that has kept the play alive for more than two thousand years.

The *Menæchmi* of Plautus is a piece of very skilful theatrical craft. It is almost heartless. In bringing it out of the Satanic kingdom of comedy into the charities of a larger system Shakespeare shows for the first time a real largeness of dramatic instinct. In his handling of the tricky ingenious plot he achieves (what, perhaps, he wrote the play to get) a dexterous, certain play of mind. He strikes the ringing note, time after time. It cannot be said that the verse, or the sense of character, or the invention is better than in the other early plays. It is not. The play is on a lower plane than any of his other works. It is the only Shakespearean play without a deep philosophical idea. If it be not a special commission, or an exercise in art, it is perhaps another instance of the price great men pay for being happy. It is certainly the fruit of a happier mood than that which bore the other early plays. It is also the first

play that shows a fine, sustained power of dramatic construction.

It is so well constructed (for the simple Elizabethan theatre and the bustle of the Elizabethan speech) that any unspoiled mind is held by it, when it is acted as Shakespeare meant it to be acted. The closeness and firmness of the dramatic texture is the work of an acutely clear mind driven at white heat and mercilessly judged at each step. Those who do not understand the nature of dramatic art should read the ninety odd verses in which Ægeon tells his story (in Act I, sc. i). They would do well to consider the power of mind that has told so much in so few words. They will find an instance of Shakespeare's happy use of stage trick, in the final scene, where, after the general recognition, Dromio of Syracuse again mistakes Antipholus of Ephesus for his master.

Rare poetical power is shown in the making of the play. Little beauty adorns the action. The speech of Adriana (in Act II, sc. ii) against the obsession of passion that leads

to treachery in marriage, is passionate and profound. It is the most deeply felt speech in the early plays. Adriana's husband is frequently another woman who, having the charm that so often goes with worthlessness, has a power of attracting that is sometimes refused to the noble. Adriana beseeches him not to break the tie that binds them. Two souls that have been each other's are not to be torn apart without death to one of them. With that sympathy for the suffering mind which gives Shakespeare all his power—

("My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits")

he gives to her speech an unendurable reality. Reality, however obtained, is the only cure for an obsession. As far as words can teach in such a case Adriana's words teach the reality of her husband's sin.

"How dearly it would touch thee to the quick,
Shouldst thou but hear I were licentious,
And that this body, consecrate to thee,
By ruffian lust should be contaminate!

Wouldst thou not spit at me and spurn at me,
And hurl the name of husband in my face,
And tear the stain'd skin off my harlot brow,
And from my false hand cut the wedding-ring. . . . ?
My blood is mingled with the crime of lust:
For, if we two be one, and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh."

There is no other poetry of this intensity in the play.

It is interesting to compare Shakespeare's mind with Plautus's in the description of Epidamnum. Plautus says—

"This is the home of the greatest lechers and drunkards.

"Very many tricksters and cheaters live in this city.

"Nowhere are wheedling whores more cunning at bilking peole."

Shakespeare gives the horror a spiritual turn that adds much to the intensity of the farce.

"They say, this town is full of cozenage:
As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such like liberties of sin."

The play is amusing. The plot is intricate. The interest of the piece is in the plot. When a plot engrosses the vitality of a dramatist's mind, his character-drawing dies; so here. It is sufficient to say that the character of Ægeon is the best in the play.

Titus Andronicus.

Written. (?)
Published. (?)
Source of the Plot. (?)

The Fable. Tamora, Queen of the Goths, whose first-born son is sacrificed by Titus Andronicus, determines to be revenged. She succeeds in her determination. Titus and his daughter are mutilated. Two of the Andronici, his sons, are beheaded.

Titus determines to be revenged. He bakes the heads of two of Tamora's sons in a pasty, and serves them up for her to eat. He then stabs her, after stabbing his daughter. He is himself stabbed on the instant; but his surviving son stabs his murderer. Tamora's paramour is then sentenced to be buried alive, and the survivors (about half the original cast) move off (as they say) "to order well the State."

This play shows an instinct for the stage and a knowledge of the theatre. It seems to have been a popular piece. A knowledge of the theatre will often make something foolish theatrically effective. So here.

The piece is nearly worthless. The turning of the tide of revenge, from Tamora against Andronicus, and then from Andronicus against Tamora, is the theme. It is a simple theme. Man cannot have simplicity without hard thought, and hard thought is never worthless, though it may be applied unworthily.

There can be no doubt that Shakespeare wrote a little of this tragedy; it is not known when; nor why. Poets do not sin against their art unless they are in desperate want. Shakespeare certainly never touched this job for love. There is only one brief trace of his great, rejoicing triumphant manner. It is possible that the play was brought to him by his theatre-manager, with some such words as these: "This piece is very bad, but it will succeed, and I mean to produce it, if I can

start rehearsals at once. Will you revise it for me? Please do what you can with it, and write in lines and passages where you think it is wanting. And whatever happens please let me have it by Monday."

The only poetry in the play comes in the three lines—

"You sad-fac'd men, people and sons of Rome,
By uproar sever'd, like a flight of fowl
Scatter'd by winds and high tempestuous gusts."

King Henry VI, Part I.

Written. 1589–91.
Produced. 1591.
Published, in the first folio, 1623.
Source of the Plot. Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles.*

The Fable. The play begins shortly after the death of King Henry V. Henry VI is too young to rule. There is a feud between Gloucester, the Lord Protector, and Cardinal Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester. In France, where Talbot is besieging Orleans, the English have had many losses. Joan of Arc begins her conquering progress by causing Talbot to raise the siege.

A feud between the Duke of York (the white rose faction) and the Earl of Somerset (the red rose faction) becomes acute, in spite of King Henry's personal intercession. It intensifies the feud between the Lord Protector and the Cardinal. In France, Talbot is killed in battle. The English are beaten from their possessions. Joan of Arc is taken, tried, and burned.

The menace of civil trouble hangs over King Henry's court. The feud between the factions of the roses threatens to break into war. The Earl of Suffolk (one of the red rose faction) schemes to marry King Henry to Margaret of Anjou. It is made plain that he means to become Margaret's lover so that he may rule England through her. A disgraceful peace is concluded with France. The play ends with Suffolk's departure to arrange the King's marriage with Margaret.

It is plain that this play is not the work of one mind. Part of it is the work of a man who saw a big tragic purpose in events. The rest is the work of at least two mechanical (sometimes muddy) minds, who neither criticised nor understood, but had some sense of the pageant. There are bright marks in the play where Shakespeare's mind touched it.

"Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,
Till, by broad spreading, it disperse to nought."

"If underneath the standard of the French
She carry armour."

"Now thou art come unto a feast of death."

"Thus, while the vulture of sedition
Feeds in the bosom of such great commanders,

Sleeping neglection doth betray to loss
The conquest of our scarce-cold conqueror,
That ever-living man of memory,
Henry the Fifth."

The work as a whole is one of the old formless chronicle plays, which inspired the remark that if an English dramatist were to make a play of St. George he would begin with the birth of the Dragon. In Act II Shakespeare's mind both directs and explains the welter. The scene in the Temple Gardens, where the men of the two factions pluck the red and white roses, is like music after discord. The play is lifted into poetry. The big tragic purpose broods; something fateful quickens. The next scene, where Mortimer dies in prison, is another instance of the power of great intellect to give life. The dying Mortimer is carried in, to show how the imminent tragedy has been for long years preparing, in countless passionate men, each of whom has shaped it, little by little, out of lust and hate, till the spiritual measure tips towards justice.

The only other scenes that bear marks of

Shakespeare's mind are those in Act IV, in which Talbot meets his death. The verse of these scenes is often careless, but it has a bright variety, pleasant to the mind after the strutting verse (wearily reiterating one prosodic effect, like choppy water) of the other authors. Some people claim that Shakespeare wrote the whole of this play. The intellect changes much in life; but never in kind, only in degree. Shakespeare's mind could play with dirt and relish dirt, but it was never base and never blunt. The base mind is betrayed by its conceptions, not by its amusements. Shakespeare's mind could never, at any stage of his career, have sunk to conceive the disgusting scene in which Joan of Arc pleads. Nor could he at any time have planned a play in which the moral idea is a trapping to physical action.

King Henry VI, Part II.

Written. 1591–2.

Produced. 1592.

Published, in the crude original form, 1593. When first published, the play was called "The First part of the Con-

tention betwixt the two famous houses of Yorke and Lancaster." This version seems to have been written by Greene and Peele. It contains passages (improving additions) that resemble Shakespeare's work; but the work is very crude. The version as a whole reads like a long scenario.

After the first production of this version, Shakespeare and some other writer, possibly Marlowe, revised, improved and enlarged it. This revised version, the *Second Part of King Henry VI*, as we now have it, was first published in the first folio in 1623.

Source of the Plot. Edward Hall's *Chronicle.*

The Fable. The play begins with the arrival of Margaret of Anjou at the Court of King Henry VI. An altercation among the Lords in scene i. explains the political situation to those who have not seen the first part of the trilogy. The subject is the gradual ascent to power of Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York. The play is turbulent with passions. The subject is obscured and made grander by the war of interests and lusts among the nobles of the Court. The Queen's party, the Duke Humphrey's party, and Cardinal Beaufort's party, make a welter of hate and greed, against which the Duke of York's cool purpose stands out, as Augustus stands out against the wreck of old Rome. The action is interrupted and lightened by the cheat of Simpcox and by the rebellion of Jack Cade. In modern theatres the passage of time is indicated by the dropping of a curtain and by a few words printed on a programme. The Elizabethan theatre had neither curtain nor programme. The passage of time was suggested by some action on the stage as here. The play advances the tragedy of the King by removing the figures of Duke Humphrey, the Cardinal, and the Earl of Suffolk. It ends with the first triumph of the white rose faction, under the Duke of York, at the battle of St. Albans.

It is plain that Shakespeare worked upon the revision of this play with a big tragic conception. The first half of the piece is very fine. He makes the crude, muddy, silly welter of the Contention significant and complete. He reduces it to a simple, passionate order, deeply impressive. The poet who worked with him, worked in sympathy with his dramatic intention. If this poet were Marlowe, as some believe (and the clearness of the man's brain seems to point to this), it is another proof that the two great poets were friends during the last months of Marlowe's life. It is plain that something stopped the revision before it was finished. The latter half of the play is only half written. It has flesh and blood but no life. It reads like work that has been wrought to a pitch by two or three re-writings, and then left without the final writing that turns imagination into vision. It would be interesting to know why Shakespeare left the play in this state. Perhaps there was no time to make it perfect before the rehearsals began. Perhaps the

murder of Marlowe upset the plans of the capitalist who was speculating in the play. If it had been finished in the spirit of the first two and a half acts it would have been one of the grandest of the historical plays.

The poetry of the two completed acts is often noble. The long speech of York, in Act I, coming, as it does, after a clash of minds turbid with passion, is most noble. It gives a terror to what follows. The calm mind makes no mistake. The judgment of a man without heart seems as infallible as fate, as beautiful, and as ghastly. All happens as he foresees. All the cruelty and bloodiness of the latter half of the play come from that man's beautifully clear, cool brain. He stands detached. One little glimmer of heart in him would alter everything. The glimmer never comes. Humphrey is poisoned, Suffolk is beheaded, the Cardinal dies. Cade, in that most awful scene of the mob in power, looks at two heads on pikes with the remark—

"Is not this braver? Let them kiss one another, for they loved well when they were alive. . . .
Now part them again."

These are some of the results of the working of a fine intellect in which—

"Faster than spring-time showers comes thought on thought,
And not a thought but thinks on dignity."

There is a terrible scene at the Cardinal's death-bed. The Cardinal is discovered in bed "raving and staring as if he were madde." He has poisoned his old enemy, the Duke Humphrey. Now he is dying; the murder is on his soul, and nothing has been gained by it. The path is made clearer for his enemies perhaps. That is the only result. Now he is dying, the waste of mind is at an end, and the figure of the victim is at the foot of the bed.

"Bring me unto my trial when you will.
Died he not in his bed? where should he die?

Can I make men live, whe'r they will or no?
O, torture me no more, I will confess.
Alive again? then show me where he is:
I'll give a thousand pound to look upon him.
He hath no eyes, the dust hath blinded them.
Comb down his hair: Look! look! it stands upright.
Like lime-twigs set to catch my winged soul.
Give me some drink."

Some people find humour in the Simpcox and Cade scenes. There is more sadness and horror of heart than humour. The minds of the two great poets were brooding together on life. They saw man working with intellect to bring ruin, and working without intellect to bring something beastlier than man should know. In its unfinished state the play is without the exaltation of great tragedy. It would be one of the hopeless plays, were it not for the passionate energy of mind with which the nobles alter life. There is little human feeling in the play. Warwick by Gloucester's corpse shows the sense of rectitude of a police inspector. At the death-bed

of the Cardinal, he makes the remark of a fiend—

"See how the pangs of death do make him grin."

The one human, tender figure is that of the King, who betrays his friend, his only true friend—

"With sad unhelpful tears; and with dimm'd eyes
Looks after him, and cannot do him good."

This gentle, bewildered soul makes the only human remarks in the play. In Shakespeare's vision it is from such souls, planted, to their own misery, among spikes and thorns, that the flower of human goodness blossoms.

King Henry VI, Part III.

Written. (?)

Published, in the crude original form, 1595. When first published, the play was called "The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke, and the Death of good King Henrie the Sixt, with the whole contention betweene the two Houses of Lancaster and Yorke." This version seems to have been by Greene, Peele, Marlowe, or by some combination among the three. There are some marks of Shakespeare's hand upon it; but not many. Afterwards the piece was revised

and enlarged to its present form by some unknown hand, Shakespeare added a few touches to this revision. It was printed in the first folio as his original work.

Source of the Plot. Edward Hall's *Chronicle.* Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle.*

The Fable. The play describes the rise to power of Edward, Duke of York, afterwards Edward IV. It carries on the story of the reign of Henry VI from the time of his deposition by Richard, Duke of York, to the time of his murder by Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Various other tragedies are developed by the plot. Richard, Duke of York, is defeated and put to death. The Earl of Warwick rises to power, makes Edward, Duke of York, King, revolts from him, restores Henry VI, is attacked, defeated, and killed in battle. Richard, Duke of Gloucester, begins to cherish ambition, and sets bloodily to work to gratify it. Edward, Duke of York, after one deposition, due to his own treachery, obtains the supreme power, and rules as King.

Shakespeare had little hand in this ruthless chronicle. The idea of the piece seems to be this, that—

"It is war's prize to take all vantages,"

that mercy has no place in war, that an act of mercy in war is more fatal than defeat, and that the parfit gentle knight, if he wish to prosper, must greet his father after battle with some such remark as—

"I cleft his beaver with a downright blow;
That this is true, father, behold his blood."

There are three scenes that rouse human emotion: that in Act I, sc. iv, where Margaret of Anjou taunts the captured York before putting him to death; that in Act II, sc. v, where King Henry wishes himself either dead, or called to some gentler trade than kingship; and that at the end, after the battle of Tewkesbury, where the Prince of Wales is murdered in his mother's presence. The second of these, the lamentation of King Henry, is an enlargement, done in leisure, from a suggestion in the early version. It is a very beautiful example of the quiet, limpid running rhetoric that marks Shakespeare's best moments in the days before he attained to power.

"So minutes, hours, days, moneths and years,
Pass'd over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
Ah, what a life were this. How sweet. How lovely.
Gives not the hawthorn-bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich-embroidered canopy
To kings that fear their subjects' treachery."

A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Written. 1595 (?)
Published. 1600.

Source of the Plot. The fantasy is of Shakespeare's making. Some of it was perhaps current in popular belief. Names and lesser incidents were suggested by various books. He took little bits from various sources, added them to the vision, and turned upon the whole the light of his mind. If any author laid under contribution were to recognise his bantling, he could only cry to it, "Bless thee, Bottom, thou art translated." Shakespeare did never this particular kind of wrong but with just cause.

The Fable. Theseus, Duke of Athens, is about to marry Hippolyta. Bottom, the weaver, and his friends, plan to play the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe before the Duke after the wedding.

Hermia and Lysander, two lovers, whose match is opposed, plan to escape from Athens to a state where they can marry.

Demetrius, in love with Hermia, is loved by Helena.

Oberon, King of the fairies, planning to punish his Queen Titania, orders Puck to procure a juice that will make her dote upon the next thing seen by her.

Helena pursues Demetrius into the wood of the fairies. Titania, anointed with the juice, falls in love with Bottom. Lysander, anointed with the juice, falls in love with Helena. The confusion caused by these enchantments (accidentally) makes the main action of the play. When the purpose of Oberon is satisfied, the enchantments are removed. The cross purposes of the lovers cease. Theseus causes Hermia to wed Lysander, and Helena to wed Demetrius. Bottom and his company perform their tragedy, and all ends happily.

It is a strange and sad thing that the English poets have cared little for England;

or, caring for England, have had little sense of the spirit of the English. Many of our poets have written botanical verses, and braggart verses, many more have described faithfully the appearance of parts of the land at different seasons. Only two or three show the mettle of their pasture in such a way that he who reads them can be sure that the indefinable soul of England has given their words something sacred and of the land.

Shakespeare attained to all the spiritual powers of the English. He made a map of the English character. We have not yet passed the frontiers of it. It is one of his humanities that the English country, which made him, always meant much to him, so that, now, wherever his works go, something of the soul of that country goes too, to comfort exiles over the sea. Man roams the world, wandering and working; but he is not enough removed from the beasts to escape the prick in the heart that turns the tired horse homeward, and sets the old fox padding through

the woods to die near the earth where he was whelped. Shakespeare's heart always turned for quiet happiness to the country where he lived as a boy. In this play, he turned not to the squires and farm-folk, but to the country itself, and to those genii of the country, the fairies, believed in, and often seen by country people, and reverenced by them as the cause of mishaps. Imagination in a work of art is a transmuting of the known by understanding. For some reason, perhaps home-sickness, perhaps weariness of the city-jostle, that those who have lived the country life cannot call life, or it may be, perhaps, from an exultation in the bounty of the world to give pleasure to the mind, the country meant very much to Shakespeare in the months during which he wrote the last of the English plays. In writing this play, his imagination conceived Athens as an English town, possibly Stratford, or some other more pleasant place, with a wood, haunted by fairies, only a league away, where the mind

could be happy listening to the voice of the beloved—

"More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear,
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear."

There was a memory of happiness about the wood. It was

"the wood, where often you and I
Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet."

In this wood, where Theseus goes a-hunting, Shakespeare, in his fantasy, allows the fairies to vex the life of mortals. For a little while he fancied, or tried to fancy, that those who are made mad and blind by the obsessions of passion are made so at the whim of powers outside life, and that the accidents of life, bad seasons, personal deformities, etc., are due to something unhappy in a capricious immortal world, careless of this world, but easily offended and appeased by mortal action.

All the earth of England is consecrated by the intense memories of the English. In

this play Shakespeare set himself free to tell his love for the earth of England that had ministered to his mind with beauty through the years of youth. Walking in the Cotswold country, when

"russet-pated choughs, many in sort
Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
Sever themselves and madly sweep the sky,"

gives to the passenger a sense of the enduringness of the pageant upon which those seeing eyes looked more than three centuries ago.

Romeo and Juliet.

Written. 1591–96.

Published, in a mutilated form, 1597.

Source of the Plot. The story existed in many forms, mostly Italian. Shakespeare took it from Arthur Broke's metrical version (*Romeus and Juliet*), and possibly consulted the prose version in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*. The tale had been dramatised and performed before Arthur Broke published his poem in 1562. The play (if it existed a generation later) may have helped Shakespeare. It is now lost.

The Fable. The houses of Montague and Capulet are at feud in Verona.

Romeo, of the house of Montague, falls in love with Juliet, of the house of Capulet. She returns his love. A friar marries them.

In a street brawl, which Romeo does his best to stop,

Mercutio, Romeo's friend, is killed by Tybalt, Juliet's cousin. Carried away by passion, Romeo kills Tybalt. He is banished from Verona.

The Capulets plan to marry Juliet to the Count Paris.

Juliet, in great distress, consults the Friar who married her to Romeo. He gives her a potion to create an apparent death in her, to the end that she may be buried in the family vault, taken thence and restored to life by himself, and then conveyed to Romeo. He writes to Romeo, telling him of the plan; but the letter miscarries. Juliet takes the potion, and is laid in the tomb as dead.

The Count Paris comes by night to the tomb, to mourn her there. Romeo, who has heard only that his love is dead, also comes to the tomb. The two lovers fight, and Romeo kills Paris. He then takes poison and dies at Juliet's side.

The friar enters to restore Juliet to life. Juliet awakens to find her lover dead. The friar, being alarmed, leaves the tomb. Juliet stabs herself with Romeo's dagger and dies.

The feud of the Montagues and Capulets is brought to an end. The leaders of the two houses are reconciled over the bodies of the lovers.

This play is one of the early plays, written, perhaps, before Shakespeare was thirty years old. It was much revised during the next few years; but a good deal of the early work remains. Much of the early work is in rhymed couplets. Much is in picked prose full of quibbles and mistakings of the word. Another sign of early work is the mention of

the dark lady, the Rosaline of the *Comedy of Errors*, here called by the same name, and described in similar terms: viz. a high forehead, a hard heart, a white face, big black eyes and red lips. Perhaps she appeared as one of the characters in the early drafts of the play. In the play as we have it she is only talked of as a love of Romeo's who is easily thrown aside when Juliet enters.

The play differs slightly from the other plays, which deal, as we have said, with the treacheries caused by obsessions. The subject of this play is not so much the treachery as the obsession that causes it. The obsession is the blind and raging one of sudden, gratified youthful love. That storm in the blood has never been so finely described. It takes sudden hold upon two young passionate natures, who have hardly met each other. It drives out instantly from Romeo a sentimental love that had made him mopish and wan. It brings to an end in two hearts, filial affection and that perhaps stronger thing, attachment to family. It makes the charming

young man a frantic madman, careless of everything but his love. It makes the sweet-natured girl a deceitful, scheming liar, less frantic, but not less devoted than her lover. It results almost at once in five violent deaths, and a legacy of broken-heartedness not easily told. The only apparent good of the disease is that it destroys its victims swiftly. It may also be said of it that it teaches the old that there is something in life, some power not dreamed of in their philosophy.

Shakespeare saw the working of the fever. He also saw behind it the working of fate to avenge an obsession that had blinded the eyes of men too long. The feud of the two houses had long vexed Verona. The blood of those killed in the feud was crying out for the folly to stop, so that life might be lived. What business had sparks like Mercutio, and rebels like Tybalt, with Death? Both are life's bright fire: they ought to live. Fate seemed to plot to end the folly by letting Romeo fall in love with Juliet. Let the two houses be united by marriage, as at the end of *Richard*

III. But love is a storm, sudden love a madness, and the fire of youth a disturber of the balances. Hate and hot blood put an end to all chance of marriage. There is nothing left but the desperate way, which is yet the wise way, recommended by the one wise man in the cast. With a little patience, this way would lead the couple to happiness. Impatience, the fever in the blood that began these coils, makes the way lead them to death. Accident, or rather the possession by others of that prudence wanting in himself, keeps Romeo from the knowledge of the friar's plans. A too hasty servant tells him that Juliet is dead. He too hastily believes the news. He takes horse at once in a state of frenzy, hardly heeding what his man says. He comes to the tomb in Verona, and finds there a lover as desperate as himself. They fight there, madly. The less mad of the two is killed, the more frantic (Romeo) kills himself. The friar, coming to this death-scene, comes a moment too late. Juliet wakes from her trance a moment too late. Theirs are the

only delays in this drama of fever, in which everybody hurries so that he stumbles. Their delays are atoned for an instant later, his, by his too great haste to be gone, she by her thirst for death. The men of the watch come too late to save her. The parents learn too late that they have been blind. They have to clasp hands over dead bodies, that have missed of life through their hurry to seize it.

The play tells the story of a feud greater than that of the Verona houses. There is always feud where there is not understanding. There is eternal feud between those two camps of misunderstanding, age and youth. This play, written by a young man, shows the feud from the point of view of youth. The play of King Lear shows it from the point of view of age. This play of youth is as lovely and as feverish as love itself. Youth is bright and beautiful, like the animals. Age is too tired to care for brightness, too cold to care for beauty. The bright, beautiful creatures dash themselves

to pieces against the bars of age's forging, against law, custom, duty, and those inventions of cold blood which youth thinks cold and age knows to be wise.

Man cannot quote a minute from some hour of passion when the moon shone and many nightingales were singing. He can hold out some flower that blossomed then, saying, "this scent will tell you." The beauty of this play is of that kind. The lines—

"Come, civil night,
Thou sober-suited matron, all in black"—

and the most exquisite, unmatchable lines—

"Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
Thou are not conquer'd: beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there"—

show with what a tender beauty the great mind feels when touched.

The Nurse gives an animal comedy to some

of the scenes. She is a tragical figure. She is the person to whom Juliet has to turn for help at dangerous moments. There are few things sadder than the sight of the fine soul turning to the vulgar soul in moments of need. One of the few things sadder is the sight of wisdom failing to stop tragedy, as it fails here, through hotness of the blood and unhappy chance. Some have felt that the spark, Mercutio, is drawn from Shakespeare's self. 'Every character in the play is drawn from Shakespeare's self.' Shakespeare found Goneril and Juliet in his mind, just as he found Mercutio and Friar Laurence. If he may be identified with any of his characters, it must be with those whose wisdom is like the many-coloured wisdom that gives the plays their unity. He is in calm, wise, gentle people who speak largely, from a vision detached from the world, as Friar Laurence speaks—

"For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give;

Nor aught so good, but, strain'd from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometimes by action dignified."

King John.

Written. (?)

Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. Shakespeare's tragedy is founded on a play called *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (author not known) which was printed (after stage performance) in 1591. Some people think that Shakespeare wrote *The Troublesome Raigne.* There are some glimmerings of his mind here and there in it; but not many. Whether he wrote it or not he certainly made free use of it in writing *King John.* He took from it with a bold hand, whenever he wished to spare himself mechanical labour. His other sources were the historians, Raphael Holinshed, Edward Hall, and Fabian.

The Fable. King John has made himself king of England. Prince Arthur, who claims to be the rightful king (he is the son of King John's elder brother), causes the French king to support his claim. King John declares war against the French King.

After some fighting in France the two kings patch up a peace. Arthur's claim is set aside. King John's niece is to marry the French King's son.

At this point the Pope's legate causes the French King to break off the negotiations. The war begins again. King John captures Prince Arthur, and gives order that secretly he be put to death. England is in

a disturbed condition. The French resolve to attempt the conquest of England.

The report that Arthur has been murdered by the King's order sets England in turmoil. The French land in Kent. The lords find Arthur's dead body outside Northampton castle. They are convinced that King John has caused him to be murdered.

King John finds that he cannot fight longer. He makes his submission to the Pope's legate, trusting that the legate may make the French King come to terms. The French King cannot be moved to peace. John summons up his forces, and gives successful battle to him. The English lords, who have allied themselves to the French King, break off and make their submission to King John. Without their help, the army is too weak. The French invasion comes to nothing. The Pope's legate makes peace. King John dies of poison given to him by a monk.

Like the best Shakespearean tragedies, *King John* is an intellectual form in which a number of people with obsessions illustrate the idea of treachery. The illustrations are very various. Perhaps the most interesting of them are those subtle ones that illustrate treachery to type, or want of conformity to a standard imagined or established.

In the historical plays, Shakespeare's mind broods on the idea that our tragical kings failed because they did not conform to a type

lower than themselves. Henry V conforms to type. He has the qualities that impress the bourgeoisie. He is a success. Henry VI does not conform to type. He has the qualities of the Christian mystic. He is stabbed in the Tower. Edward IV conforms to type. He has the qualities that impress the rabble. He is a success. Richard II does not conform to type. He is a man of ideas. He is done to death at Pomfret. King John does not conform to type. His intellect is bigger than his capacity for affairs. He is poisoned by a monk at Swinstead.

King John presents that most subtle of all the images of treachery, a man who cannot conform to the standard of his own ideas. He fails as a king because his intellect prompts him to attempt what is really beyond the powers of his nature to perform. By his side, with an irony that is seldom praised, Shakespeare places the figure of the Bastard, the man who ought to have been king, the man fitted by nature to rule the English, the man without intellect but with a rough

capacity, the man whom we meet again, as a successful king, in the play of *Henry V.*

King John is placed throughout the play in treacherous relations with life. He is a traitor to his brother's son, to his own ideas, to the English idea, and to his oath of kingship. He has a bigger intellect than any one about him. His brain is full of gusts and flaws that blow him beyond his age, and then let him sink below it. Persistence in any one course of treachery would give him the greatness of all well-defined things. He remains a chaos shooting out occasional fire.

The play opens with a scene that displays some of the human results of treachery. John's mother, Elinor, has been treacherous to one of her sons. John has usurped his brother's right, and, in following his own counsel, has been treacherous to his mother. These acts of treachery have betrayed England into a bloody and unjust war. The picture is turned suddenly. Another of the results of human treachery appears in the person of the Bastard, whose mother con-

fesses that she was seduced by the "long and vehement suit" of Cœur de Lion. The Bastard's half-brother, another domestic traitor, does not scruple to accuse his mother of adultery in the hope that, by doing so, he may obtain the Bastard's heritage.

The same breaking of faith for advantage gives points to the second act, where the French and English Kings turn from their pledged intention to effect a base alliance. They arrange to marry the Dauphin to Elinor's niece, Blanch of Castile. In the third act, before the fury of the constant has died down upon this treachery, the French King adds another falseness. He breaks away from the newly-made alliance at the bidding of the Pope's legate. The newly-married Dauphin treacherously breaks with his wife's party. In the welter of war that follows, the constant, human and beautiful figures come to heartbreak and death. The common people of England begin to betray their genius for obedience by preparing to rise against the man in power.

The fourth act begins with the famous scene in which Hubert fails to blind Prince Arthur. Even in the act of mercy he is treacherous. He breaks faith with King John, to whom he has vowed to kill the Prince. Later in the act, King John, thinking that the murder has been done, breaks faith with Hubert, by driving him from his presence. In the last act, the English nobles, who have been treacherous to John, betray their new master, the French King. King John is a broken man, unable to make head against misfortune. He betrays his great kingly idea, that the Pope shall not rule here, by begging the Legate to make peace. At this point death sets a term to treachery. A monk treacherously poisons John at a moment when his affairs look brighter. The play ends with the Bastard's well-known brag about England—

"Naught shall make us rue
If England to itself do rest but true."

This thought is one among many thoughts taken by Shakespeare from the play of *The*

Troublesome Raigne, and taken by the author of that play direct from Holinshed's *Chronicle*.

Comedy deals with character and accident; tragedy with passionate moods of the soul in conflict with fate. In this play, as in nearly all poetical plays, the characters that are most minutely articulated are those commoner, more earthy characters, perceived by the daily mind, not uplifted, by brooding, into the rare state of passionate intellectual vision. These characters are triumphant creations; but they come from the commoner qualities in Shakespeare's mind. He did them easily, with his daily nature. What he did on his knees, with contest and bloody sweat, are his great things. The great scheme of the play is the great achievement, not the buxom boor who flouts the Duke of Austria, and takes the national view of his mother's dishonour.

Shakespeare, like other sensitive, intelligent men, saw that our distinctive products, the characters that we set most store by, are very strange. That beautiful kindness, high courage, and devoted service should go so often

with real animal boorishness and the incapacity to see more than one thing at a time (mistaken for stupidity by stupid people) puzzled him, as it puzzles the un-English mind to-day. A reader feels that in the figure of the Bastard he set down what he found most significant in the common English character. With the exceptions of Sir Toby Belch and Justice Shallow, the Bastard is the most English figure in the plays. He is the Englishman neither at his best nor at his worst, but at his commonest. The Englishman was never so seen before, nor since. An entirely honest, robust, hearty person, contemptuous of the weak, glad to be a king's bastard, making friends with women (his own mother one of them) with a trusty, good-humoured frankness, fond of fighting, extremely able when told what to do, fond of plain measures —the plainer the better, an honest servant, easily impressed by intellect when found in high place on his own side, but utterly incapable of perceiving intellect in a foreigner, fond of those sorts of humour which generally lead

to blows, extremely just, very kind when not fighting, fond of the words "fair play," and nobly and exquisitely moved to deep, true poetical feeling by a cruel act done to something helpless and little. The completeness of the portrait is best seen in the suggestion of the man's wisdom in affairs. The Bastard is trying to find out whether Hubert killed Arthur, whose little body lies close beside them. He says that he suspects Hubert "very grievously." Hubert protests. The Bastard tests the protest with one sentence: "Go bear him in thine arms." He utters the commonplace lines—

"I am amaz'd, methinks, and lose my way
Among the thorns and dangers of the world"—

while he watches Hubert's face. Hubert stands the test (the emotional test that none but an Englishman would apply), he picks up the body. Instantly the Bastard is touched to a tenderness that lifts Hubert to a spiritual comradeship with him—

"How easy dost thou take all England up."

This tragedy of the death of a child causes nearly all that is nobly poetical in the play.

All the passionately-felt scenes are about Arthur or his mother. Some have thought that Shakespeare wrote the play in 1596, shortly after the death of his little son Hamnet, aged eleven. The supposition accuses Shakespeare of a want of heart, of a want of imagination, or of both wants together. He wrote like every other writer, from his sense of what was fitting in an imagined situation. It was no more necessary for him to delay the writing of Prince Arthur till his son had died than it was for Dickens to wait till he had killed a real Little Dorrit by slow poison.

There is a great change in the manner of the poetical passages. The poetry of the *Henry VI* plays is mostly in bright, sweetly running groups of rhetorical lines. In *King John* it is either built up elaborately into an effect of harmony several lines long, or it is put into a single line or couplet.

The rhetoric is compressed—

"That shakes the rotten carcase of old Death,"

and

"O death, made proud with pure and princely beauty,"

and

"Old Time the clock-setter, that bald sexton Time."

The finest poetry is intensely compressed—

"I will instruct my sorrows to be proud,
For grief is proud,"

and

"I have heard you say,
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven.
If that be true, I shall see my boy again,"

and

"When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
I shall not know him."

The characters in this truly noble play

daunt the reader with a sense of their creator's power. It is difficult to know intimately any human soul, even with love as a lamp. Shakespeare's mind goes nobly into these souls, bearing his great light. It is very wonderful that the mind who saw man clearest should see him with such exaltation.

King Richard II.

Written. (?)

Published. 1597.

Source of the Plot. The lives of King Richard II and King Henry IV in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

The Fable. I. The Duke of Gloucester, uncle of King Richard, has died under suspicious circumstances at Calais, after an accusation of treachery. Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, the King's cousin, accuses Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, of treachery to the King and of the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. The King appoints a day on which the two disputants may try their cause by combat. On their arrival at the lists he banishes them both, Bolingbroke for six years, Mowbray for ever. After they have gone to fulfil their sentence, the King plans to subdue the rebels in Ireland. He prays that the death of his uncle, John of Gaunt, the wisest man about him, may occur, so that he may take his money to equip soldiers.

II. Gaunt dies. Richard seizes his estate (lawfully the property of Bolingbroke) and proceeds upon his Irish war. Bolingbroke lands from exile to claim his father's estate and title. Richard's Welsh forces grow weary of waiting for their king. They disband themselves.

III. Bolingbroke's party prospers. Richard is taken and deposed.

IV. Bolingbroke makes himself king.

V. Richard, after sorrowing alone, and inspiring a hopeless attempt at restoration, is killed, desperately fighting, at Pomfret.

Treachery in some form is at the root of all Shakespearean tragedy. In this play it takes many forms, among which two are principal, the treachery of a king to his duty as a king, and the treachery of a subject to his duty as a subject. As usual in Shakespearean tragedy, the play is filled full by the abundant mind of the author with illustrations of his idea. The apricocks at Langley are like King Richard, the sprays of the trees like Bolingbroke, the weeds like the King's friends. Everybody in the play (even the horse in the last act) is in passionate relation to the central idea.

King Richard is of a type very interesting to Shakespeare. He is wilful, complex, passionate, with a beauty almost childish and a love of pleasure that makes him greedy of all gay, light, glittering things. He loves the music that does not trouble with passion

and the thought not touched with the world. He loves that kind of false, delicate beauty which is made in societies where life is too easy. There is much that is beautiful in him. He has all the charm of those whom the world calls the worthless. His love is a woman, as beautiful and unreal as himself. He fails because, like other rare things, he is not common. The world cares little for the rare and the interesting. The world calls for the rough and common virtue that guides a plough in a furrow, and sergeantly chaffs by the camp fires. The soul that suffers more than other souls is little regarded here. The tragedy of the sensitive soul, always acute, becomes terrible when that soul is made king here by one of the accidents of life. As a king, Richard neglects his duties with that kind of wilfulness which the world never fails to punish. The wilfulness takes the form of a shutting of the eyes to all that is truly kingly. He rebukes devotion to duty by banishing Bolingbroke, who tries to rid him of a traitor. He rebukes old age and wisdom

in the truly great person of old John of Gaunt. Worst, and most unkingly of all, he is incapable of seeing and rewarding the large generosity of mind that makes sacrifices for an idea. Richard, who likes beautiful things, cannot see the beauty of old, rough, dying Gaunt, who condemns his own son to exile rather than betray his idea of justice. Bolingbroke, who cares intensely for nothing but justice (and could not give even that caring a name, if questioned), is deeply and nobly generous to York, who would condemn his own son, and to the Bishop of Carlisle, who would die rather than not speak his mind. Men who sacrifice themselves are a king's only props. Richard allies himself with men who prefer to sacrifice the country.

It is a proof of the greatness of Shakespeare's vision, that Richard is presented to us both as the traitor and the betrayed. He is the anointed king false to his coronation oaths; he is the anointed king deposed by traitors. He is not fitted for kingship, but life has made him a king. Life, quite as

much as temperament, is to blame for his tragedy. When life and temperament have thrust him from kingship, this wilful, passionate man, so greedy and heady in his hurry to be unjust, is unlike the monster that office made him. He is no monster then, but a man, not even a man like ourselves, but a man of singular delicacy of mind, sensitive, strangely winning, who wrings our hearts with pity by his sense of his tragedy—

"And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disorder'd string;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke."

Part of his tragedy is due to his being too late. Had he landed from Ireland one day earlier he would have found a force of Welshmen ready to fight for him. At the end of the play he discovers, too late, that he is weary of patience. He strikes out like a man, when he has no longer a friend to strike with him. He is killed by a man who finds, too late, that the murder was not Bolingbroke's intention.

As in all the tragedies, there is much noble poetry. John of Gaunt's speech about England is often quoted. Shakespeare's mind is our triumph, not a dozen lines of rhetoric. Less wellknown are the couplets—

"My inch of taper will be burnt and done,
And blindfold death not let me see my son."

and

". . . let him not come there,
To seek out sorrow that dwells everywhere."

Those scenes in the last acts which display the mind of the deposed king are all exquisite, though their beauty is not obvious to the many. There is a kind of intensity of the soul, so intense that it is obscure to the many till it is interpreted. Writers of plays know well how tamely words intensely felt may read. They know, too, how like fire upon many souls those words will be when the voice and the action give them their interpretation. *Richard II*, like other plays of spiritual tragedy, needs interpretation. When he wrote it, Shakespeare had not wholly the

power that afterwards he achieved, of himself interpreting his vision by many-coloured images. It is not one of the beloved plays.

Bolingbroke has been praised as a manly Englishman, who is not "weak" like Richard, but "strong" and a man of deeds. In Act IV he shows his English kindness of mind and love of justice by a temperate wisdom in the trying of a cause and by saying that he will call back from exile his old enemy Norfolk. The Bishop of Carlisle tells him that that cannot be. Norfolk having worn himself out in the wars in Palestine has retired himself to Italy, and there, at Venice, given

"His body to that pleasant country's earth,
And his pure soul unto his captain Christ,
Under whose colours he had fought so long."

It is instructive to note how Bolingbroke takes the news—

Bol. Why, bishop, is Norfolk dead?
Carl. As surely as I live, my lord.
Bol. Sweet peace conduct his sweet soul to the bosom

Of good old Abraham. Lords appellants,
Your differences, etc.

The feeling that the poet's mind saw the clash as the clash between the common and the uncommon man is strengthened by the Queen's speech to Richard as he is led to prison—

"thou most beauteous inn,
Why should hard-favour'd grief be lodged in thee,
When triumph is become an alehouse guest?"

King Richard III.

Written. 1594 (?)
Published. 1597.

Source of the Plot. The play is founded on the lines of Edward IV, Edward V, and Richard III, as given (on the authorities of Edward Hall and Sir Thomas More) in Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Shakespeare may have seen a worthless play (*The True Tragedy of Richard III*) which was published in 1594, by an unknown author.

The Fable. Act I. The play begins in the last days of King Edward IV, when the King's two brothers, Clarence and Gloucester, are debating who shall succeed to the throne when the King dies. In the first scene Clarence is led to the Tower under suspicion of plotting to succeed. Richard, Duke of Gloucester, the cause of the committal, pretends to grieve for him, but hastens to compass his death. In the next scene Richard woos the Lady Anne (widow of the dead son of Henry VI. and daughter of the Earl of Warwick), who

is likely to be useful to him for the moment as an ally (she being of the house of Lancaster). The third scene displays the passionate quarrelling of the Court factions. The Queen, her brothers and, Richard's party are cursed by Margaret of Anjou. In the fourth scene, Clarence is murdered in the Tower.

Act II. King Edward IV dies, having patched up a seeming truce between the factions. His son is to succeed him. Before this can happen, Richard strikes down the leaders of the Queen's party, and lays a deep scheme to secure the crown for himself.

Act III. There is a deeply tragical scene in which the unsuspecting Hastings, who is faithful to Edward's memory, is hurried out of life. Afterwards, through the management of Buckingham, Richard is proclaimed King.

Act IV. Richard makes himself sure by casting off Buckingham and causing the murder of Edward's sons in the Tower. He plots to marry Edward's daughter. But by this time the land is in upheaval against him. Buckingham and Richmond lead forces against him.

Act V. Buckingham is taken and put to death; but Richmond's forces gather head. Richard leads his army to oppose them. The armies front each other at Bosworth Field near Leicester. The night before the battle the ghosts of the many slain during the progress of the Wars of the Roses menace Richard and promise victory to Richmond. In the battle that follows Richard is slain. Richmond takes oath to end the Wars of the Roses by marrying Edward's daughter, so that the two royal houses may at last be joined.

Richard III is the last of the great historical plays about the Wars of the Roses. The subject of the wars had occupied Shake-

speare's mind for many months. He had traced them from their beginning in the long ago to their end among the dead at Bosworth. All that bloodiness of misery was due to a forgotten marriage and the chance that Edward III had seven sons, the eldest of whom died before his father. In this great tragic vision Shakespeare saw the wheel come full circle, with that giving of justice which life renders at last, though it may be to the dead, or the mad, or the broken.

Largely, this play deals with the coming of that justice. Much that is most wonderful in the play comes from the faith that blood cruelly or unjustly spilt cries from the ground, and that the human soul, wrought to an ecstasy, has power, as the blood has power, to draw God's hand upon the guilty. But Shakespeare's mind was also occupied with the knowledge that self-confident intellect is terrible and tragical. One of the truths of the play is the very sad one that being certain is in itself a kind of sin, sure to be avenged by life. The obsession of self-confidence betrays

person after person, to misery or death. All the heads that lift themselves proudly go bloody to the dust or bow in anguish. Only one man moves by other light than his own. He is the only one who achieves quiet triumph. Nothing in the play is more impressive than the speech in which the intellect that has ended the bloodshed prays humbly that God may bless and help England with peace.

It was said of Napoleon that he was as great as a man can be without virtue. The intellect of Richard III is like that of Napoleon. It is restless, swift, and sure of its power. It is sure, too, that the world stays as it is from something stupid in the milky human feelings. Richard is a "bloody dog" let loose in a sheepfold. It is a part of the tragedy that he is nobler than the sheep that he destroys. His is the one great intellect in the play. Intellect is always rare. In kings it is very rare. When a great intellect is made bitter by being cased in deformity one has the tragedy of intellect turned upon itself. Had Richard been born without his deformed

shoulder he could have known human sympathy, and human intercourse. Without human intercourse he goes gloating, clutching himself, biting his lip, muttering at the twist in his shadow. This warped, starved mind knows himself stronger than the minds near him. It is tragical to be deformed, it is tragical to have an intellect too great for people to understand. But the deformed and bitter intellect would suffer tragedy indeed if he, the one constant Yorkist, were to be ruled by a gentle, half-witted Lancastrian saint like Henry VI, or by Clarence the perjurer, or by the upstart Woodville, a commoner made noble because his sister took the King's fancy, or by the Queen herself, the housewife who caused great Warwick's death, or by one of her sons, who are pert to the man who had spilt his blood to make their father king. The snarling intellect bites rather than suffer that. It is very terrible, but how if he had not bitten? The vision of all this bloodiness is less terrible than that vision of the sheep triumphing, so dear to us moderns—

"Strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill."

As in all Shakespeare's greater plays, a justice brings evil upon the vow breaker. Curses called down in the solemn moment come home to roost when the solemnity is forgotten or thrust aside. Clarence, who broke his oath to the House of Lancaster, is done to death by his brother. Anne, cursing the killer of her husband, curses the woman who shall marry him, is, herself, that woman, and dies wretchedly. Grey, Rivers, Dorset, Buckingham and Hastings, make oaths of amity, call down curses on him that breaks them, themselves break them, and die wretchedly. Richard, too wise to make oaths, too strong to curse, dies, as his mother fortells, "by God's just ordinance," when the measure of the blood of his victims becomes too great, and when his victims' curses, after wandering from heart to heart, get them into human bodies and walk the world, executing justice.

All through the play there are warnings against human certainty. Of all the dangerous pronouncements of man that to the fountain, "Fountain, of thy water I will never drink," is one of the most dangerous. There are terrible examples of certainty betrayed. Richard is certain as only fine intellect can be that he will triumph. It is a part of his tragedy that it is not intellect that triumphs in this world, but a stupid, though a righteous something, incapable of understanding intellect. Rivers and Grey are certain that Richard is friendly to them. They are hurried to Pomfret and put to death. Hastings "Knows his state secure," and "goes triumphant." He is rushed out of life at a moment's notice, one hour a lord, giving his opinion at a council, the next a corpse in its grave. Buckingham thinks himself secure. A moment's nicety of conscience sends him flying to death. The little Princes lay down to sleep—

"girdling one another
Within their innocent alabaster arms.

Their lips were four red roses on a stalk
Which in their summer beauty kissed each other"—

when their waking time came they were stamped down under the stones at the stair foot.

The poetry of this play is that of great and high spiritual invention. There is much that stays in the mind as exquisitely said and beautifully felt. But the wonder of the work is in the greatness of the conception. That is truly great, both as poetry and as drama. The big and burning imaginings do not please, they haunt.

The dream of Clarence, the wooing of the Lady Anne, the scene in Baynard's Castle, and the ghost scene in the tents at Bosworth, have been praised and re-praised. They are in Shakespeare's normal mood, neither greater nor less than twenty other scenes in the mature plays. The really grand scene of the calling down of the curses (Act I, sc. iii), when the man's mind, after brooding on this event for months, sees it all, for a glowing

hour, as the just God sees it, is the wonderful achievement. Think of this scene, and think of the scenes played nightly now in the English theatres, and ask whether all is well with the nation's soul.

There are many superb Shakespearean openings. No poet in history opens a play with a more magnificent certainty. The opening of this play—

"Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York,"

is one of the most splendid of all. There is no need to pick out fragments from the rest of the play, but the march of the line—

"Your fire-new stamp of honour is scarce current"—

the lines—

"then came wandering by
A shadow like an angel, with bright hair
Dabbled in blood; and he squeaked out aloud,
'Clarence is come; false, fleeting, perjured Clarence,
That stabbed me in the field by Tewkesbury'"—

the exquisitely tender lines—

"And there the little souls of Edward's children
Whisper the spirits"—

and the orders of Richard in the last act, for white Surrey to be saddled, ink and paper to be brought, and a bowl of wine to be filled, show that the poet's great confident manner was formed, on all the four sides of its perfection. The years only brought it to a deeper glow.

The Merchant of Venice.

Written. (?)
Published. 1600.

Source of the Plot. The ancient story of the merciless Jew is told in the *Gesta Romanorum*, and re-told, with delicate grace, by Giovanni Fiorentino, a fourteenth-century Italian writer, in his *Il Pecorone* (the simpleton), a collection of novels, or, as we should call them, short stories. The story of the three caskets is also told in the *Gesta Romanorum*. Other incidents in the play are taken from other sources, possibly from other plays. It is thought by some that the character of Shylock was suggested by the case of the Spanish Jew, Lopez, who was hanged, perhaps unjustly, for plotting to poison Queen Elizabeth, in 1594. The main source of the dramatic fable is Fiorentino's story.

The Fable. Portia, the lady of Belmont, has three caskets,

one of gold, one of silver, one of lead. She is vowed to marry the man who, on viewing the caskets, guesses which of them contains her portrait. Various attempting suitors fail to guess rightly.

Bassanio, eager to try the hazard, obtains money from his friend Antonio, to equip him. Antonio borrows the money from the Jew, Shylock, on condition that, should he fail to repay the debt by a fixed day, a pound of his flesh shall be forfeit to the Jew.

Bassanio guesses rightly and weds Portia.

Antonio fails to repay the debt, and is lodged in prison. Bassanio hears of his friend's disaster. Portia bids him fly to Antonio with money enough to pay the debt threefold. Shylock refuses the offer. He clamours for his pound of flesh. The case comes to trial.

At the hearing of the case in the Duke's court, Portia, disguised as a judge, gives sentence, that Shylock may have his pound of flesh; but that if he shed Christian blood in the taking of it, his life will be forfeit. Shylock is confounded further by a charge of endangering a Christian's life. He is fined and humbled. Portia, still in disguise, asks as her fee a ring that she has given to Bassanio. Bassanio, hesitating, at last gives the ring, and returns home without it. Portia's pretended indignation at the loss of the ring ends the last act with comedy.

The play resolves itself into a simple form. It illustrates the clash between the emotional and the intellectual characters, the man of heart and the man of brain. The man of heart, Antonio, is obsessed by a tenderness for his friend. The man of brain is obsessed by a lust to uphold intellect in a thoughtless

world that makes intellect bitter in every age. Shylock is a man of intellect, born into a despised race. It is his tragedy that the generous Gentiles about him can be generous to everything except to intellect and Jewish blood. Intellect and Jewish blood are too proud to attempt to understand the Gentiles who cannot understand.

Shylock is a proud man. The Gentiles, who are neither proud nor intellectual, spit upon him and flout him. One of them beguiles his daughter and teaches her to rob him. Another of them signs a mad bond to help an extravagant friend to live in idleness. Bitter, lonely brooding upon these things strengthen the Jew's obsession, till the words, "I can cut out the heart of my enemy," become the message of his entire nature. Half the evils in life come from the partial vision of people in states of obsession. Shylock's obsession grows till he is in the Duke's court, whetting his knife upon his shoe, before what Pistol calls "incision."

Portia has been much praised during two

centuries of criticism. She is one of the smiling things created in the large and gentle mood that moved Shakespeare to comedy. The scene in the fifth act, where the two women, coming home from Venice by night, see the candle burning in the hall, as they draw near, is full of a naturalness that makes beauty quick in the heart. Shakespeare enjoyed the writing of this play. The construction of the last two acts shows that his great happy mind was at its happiest in the saving of these creatures of the sun from something real.

The Taming of the Shrew.

Written. (?)

Published. 1623.

Source of the Plot. The induction and that part of the play which treats of Petruchio and Katharina is based upon a play, published in 1594, under the title *The Taming of A Shrew*, author not known. The other part is based on *The Supposes* of George Gascoigne, a comedy adapted from Ariosto's *I Suppositi*.

The Fable. Christopher Sly, a tinker lying drunk by a tavern, is found by a lord, who causes him to be put to bed and treated, on waking, as a nobleman newly cured of madness. Part of the treatment is the performance of this play before him.

The play has two plots. In one of them, Petruchio woos and tames the shrew Katharina; in the other, Katharina's sister Bianca is wooed by lovers in disguise. The two plots have little connection with each other. That which relates to Petruchio and Katharina is certainly by Shakespeare. The other seems to be by a dull man who did not know his craft as a dramatist.

In the Induction, and in the speech of Biondello (in Act III) Shakespeare enters a mood of memory to the country. In the song at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* he showed a matchless sense of country life. That sense, at once robust and sweet, now gives life to a few scenes in the plays. These scenes are mostly in prose; but they have the rightness of poetry. In writing them, he wrought with his daily nature, from something intimately known, or inbred in him, during childhood. Man can only write happily from a perfect understanding. All men can describe with point and colour what they knew as children. These country scenes in Shakespeare are happier than anything else in the plays because they come, not from anything read or heard, but from the large, genial nature made by years of life among

the farms and sheep-walks at the western end of the Cotswolds.

Sly. Y' are a baggage: the Slys are no rogues; look in the chronicles; we came in with Richard Conqueror. Therefore *paucas pallabris;* let the world slide: *Sessa!*

Hostess. You will not pay for the glasses you have burst?

Sly. No, not a denier. Go by, Jeronimy: go to thy cold bed, and warm thee.

In the third act, Biondello's description of the appearance of Petruchio's horse has the abundance of the great mind.

". . . possessed with the glanders and like to mose in the chine; troubled with the lampass, infected with the fashions, full of wind-galls, sped with spavins, rayed with the yellows, past cure of the fives, stark spoiled with the staggers, begnawn with the bots, swayed in the back and shoulder-shotten; near legged before and with a half-cheeked bit and a headstall of sheep's leather."

It is something no longer possible in a city theatre. Neither the dramatist nor the audi-

ence of to-day knows a horse as the Elizabethan had to know him. The speech sets one wondering at the art of the unknown Elizabethan actor who first spoke hurriedly this speech of strange words full of sibilants.

Shakespeare's share in the play (the scenes in which the shrew and her tamer appear) is farce with ironic philosophical intention. He indicates the tragedy that occurs when a manly spirit is born into a woman's body. Katharina is vexed and plagued by forced submission to a father who cannot see her merit, and by jealousy of a gentle, useless sister. She, who is entirely honest, sees the brainless Bianca, whom no amount of schooling will make even passably honest, preferred before her. Lastly, she is humbled into the state of submissive wifely falsehood by a boor who cares only for his own will, her flesh, and her money. In a page and a half of melancholy claptrap broken Katharina endeavours to persuade us that

"Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
Even such a woman oweth to her husband."

Perhaps it is the way of the world. Women betray womanhood as much by mildness as by wiles. Meanwhile, what duty does a man owe to a fine, free, fearless spirit dragged down to his by commercial bargain with a father who is also a fool?

King Henry IV, Part I.

Written. (?)
Published. 1598.

Source of the Plot. Most of the comic scenes are the fruit of Shakespeare's invention. A very popular play, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, by an unknown hand, gave him the suggestion for an effective comic scene. In the historical scenes he follows closely the *Chronicles* of Holinshed.

The Fable. The play treats of the rising of Henry Hotspur, Lord Percy, against Henry IV of England, and of the turning of the mind of Henry, Prince of Wales, from low things to things more worthy his birth. It ends with the killing of Hotspur, by the Prince of Wales, on the battlefield at Shrewsbury. Hotspur is an uncommon man, whose uncommonness is unsupported by his father at a critical moment. Henry, Prince of Wales, is a common man, whose commonness props his father, and helps him to conquer. The play is about a son too brilliant to be understood, and a son too common to understand.

The play treats of a period some four years after the killing of King Richard II. It

opens at a time when the oaths of Henry Bolingbroke, to do justice, have been broken on all sides, lest the injustice of his assumption of kingship should be recognised and punished by those over whom he usurps power. The King is no longer the just, rather kind, man of affairs who takes power in the earlier, much finer play. He is a swollen, soured, bullying man, with all the ingratitude of a king and all the baseness of one who knows his cause to be wrong. Opposed to him is a passionate, quick-tempered man, ready to speak his mind, on the instant, to any whom he believes to be unjust or false.

This quick-tempered man, Lord Percy, has done the King a signal service. Instead of asking for reward he tries to persuade the King to be just to a man who has suffered wounds and defeat for him. The King calls him a liar for his pains.

Percy, stung to the quick, rebels. Others rebel with him, among them some who are too wise to be profitable on a council of war. War does not call for wisdom, but for swift-

ness in striking. Percy, who is framed for swiftness in striking, loses half of his slender chance because his friends are too wise to advise desperate measures. Nevertheless, his troops shake the King's troops. The desperate battle of Shrewsbury is very nearly a triumph for him. Then the Prince meets him and kills him. He learns too late that a passionate longing to right the wrong goes down before the rough and stupid something that makes up the bulk of the world. He learns that

"Thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool;
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop"—

and dies. The man who kills him says a few trite lines over his body, and leaves the stage talking of Falstaff's bowels.

Prince Henry, afterwards Henry V, has been famous for many years as "Shakespeare's only hero." Shakespeare was too wise to count any man a hero. The ways of fate moved him to vision, not heroism. If

we can be sure of anything in that great, simple, gentle, elusive brain, we can be sure that it was quickened by the thought of the sun shining on the just and on the unjust, and shining none the less golden though the soul like clay triumph over the soul like flame. Prince Henry is not a hero, he is not a thinker, he is not even a friend; he is a common man whose incapacity for feeling enables him to change his habits whenever interest bids him. Throughout the first acts he is careless and callous though he is breaking his father's heart and endangering his father's throne. He chooses to live in society as common as himself. He talks continually of guts as though a belly were a kind of wit. Even in the society of his choice his attitude is remote and cold-blooded. There is no good-fellowship in him, no sincerity, no whole-heartedness. He makes a mock of the drawer who gives him his whole little pennyworth of sugar. His jokes upon Falstaff are so little good-natured that he stands upon his princehood whenever the old man

would retort upon him. He impresses one as quite common, quite selfish, quite without feeling. When he learns that his behaviour may have lost him his prospective crown he passes a sponge over his past, and fights like a wild cat for the right of not having to work for a living.

There is little great poetry in the play. The magnificent image—

"Baited like eagles having lately bathed"—

the speech of Worcester (in Act V, sc. i) when he comes with a trumpet to speak with the King, and the call of Hotspur to set on battle—

"Sound all the lofty instruments of war,
And by that music let us all embrace"—

are all noble.

To many, the play is remarkable because it introduces Sir John Falstaff, the most notable figure in English comedy. Falstaff is that deeply interesting thing, a man who is base because he is wise. Our justest, wisest brain dwelt upon Falstaff longer than

upon any other character because he is the world and the flesh, able to endure while Hotspur flames to his death, and the enemies of the devil are betrayed that the devil may have power to betray others.

The Second Part of King Henry IV

Written. 1597 (?)

Published. 1600.

Source of the Plot. The play of *The Famous Victories of Henry V.* Holinshed's *Chronicles.*

The Fable. Northumberland and the other conspirators against the King learn that Hotspur, their associate, whom they failed to support, has been defeated and killed. The King's forces are now free to act against themselves. Northumberland retires to Scotland. The others under a divided command, make head against the King's troops under John of Lancaster. They are betrayed, taken and put to death. Northumberland, venturing out from Scotland, is defeated. King Henry's position is assured.

His safety comes too late to be pleasant to him. He is dying, and the conduct of his son gives him anxiety. He sees no chance of permanent peace. He counsels his son to begin a war abroad, to distract the attention of his subjects. Having done this, he dies.

Prince Henry begins his reign as Henry V by casting off all his old associates.

The second part of the play of *King Henry IV* is Shakespeare's ending of the

tragedy of *Richard II.* The deposition of Richard was an act of violence, unjust, as violence must be, and offensive, as injustice is, to the power behind life. The blood of the dead king, and of all those killed in fighting for him, calls upon that power, and asks justice of it. Slowly, in many secret ways, the tide sets against the slayer, till he is a worn, old, heart-broken, haunted man, dying with the knowledge that all the bloodshed has been useless, because the power so hardly won will be tossed away by his successor, the youth with "a weak mind and an able body," the "good, shallow young fellow," who "would have made a good pantler," who comes in noisily to his father's death-bed with news of the beastliest of all the treacheries of the reign. Just as the play of *Richard III* completes the action of the Wars of the Roses, this play completes the action of the killing of the Duke of Gloucester at Calais. The wheel comes full circle, crushing many that looked to be brought high, making friends enemies and enemies friends. Life

was never so brooded on since man learned to think, as, in this cycle of tragedies. In this fragment of the whole we are shown the two classes in human life, the people of instinct and the people of intellect, being preyed on by two men, one of them greedy for present ease, the other for temporal power. Both men obtain their will. Those who give up everything for one thing often obtain that thing. But it is a law of life that nothing must be paid for with too great a share of the imaginative energy. All excess of the kind is unjust, as violence must be, and offensive, as injustice is, to the power behind life. King Henry IV fails in the hour of his triumph from his manifold failures in life during the struggle for triumph. Falstaff fails in the same way. The prize of life falls to the careless and callous man who has struggled only in two minutes of his life, once, when he played a practical joke upon some thieves, and a second time when he killed Hotspur, the brilliant intellect, the "miracle of men."

Many scenes in this play are great. Shake-

speare's instinctive power was as large and as happy as his intellectual power. In this play he indulged it to the full. The Falstaff scenes are all wonderful. That in which the drunken Pistol is driven downstairs is the finest tavern scene ever written. Those placed in Gloucestershire are the perfect poetry of English country life. The talk of old dead Double, who could clad "i' the clout at twelvescore," and is now dead, as we shall all be soon; the casting back of memory to Jane Nightwork, still alive, though she belongs to a time fifty-five years past, when a man, now old, heard the chimes at midnight; the order to sow the headland, Cotswold fashion, with red Lammas wheat; the kindness and charm of the country servants, so beautiful after the drunken townsmen, are like the English country speaking. The earth of England is a good earth and bears good fruit, even the apple of man. These scenes are like an apple-loft in some old barn, where the apples of last year lie sweet in the straw.

All of those scenes seem to have been written easily, out of the fulness of an instinctive power. In the other scenes Shakespeare wrote with intense mental effort after brooding intensely on human destiny—

"how chances mock,
And changes fill the cup of alteration
With divers liquors,"

and on the truth that—

"There is a history in all men's lives,
Figuring the nature of the times deceased;
The which observed, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim, of the main chance of things
As not yet come to life."

There are two scenes of deep tragedy in the play, both awful. Shakespeare never wrote anything more terrible. They are the scene in the fourth act, where John of Lancaster tricks and betrays the rebels, and the scene at the end where the young King cuts his old friends, with a word to the Lord Justice to have them into banishment. The words of Scripture, "Put not your trust in

princes," must have rung in Shakespeare's head as he wrote these scenes.

Richard II flung down his warder at Coventry rather than let his friend venture in battle for him. From that act of mercy came his loss of the crown, his death, Mowbray's death, Hotspur's death, the murder of the leaders at Gaultree and the countless killings up and down England. At the end of this play the slaughter stops for a while so that a callous young animal may bring his country into a foreign war to divert men's minds from injustice at home.

At the end of the play there is an epilogue in prose, touching for this reason, that it is one of the few personal addresses that Shakespeare has left to us. In the plays the characters speak with a detachment never relaxed. They belong to the kingdom of vision not to the mind through which they came. In this epilogue Shakespeare speaks for all time directly to his hearers, whoever they may be.

Who are his hearers? Not the English.

Our prophet is not honoured here. This series of historical plays is one of the most marvellous things ever done by man. The plays of which it is composed have not been played in London, in their great processional pageant of tragedy, within the memory of man.

King Henry V.

Written. 1598 (?)

Published, imperfectly, 1600; as we now have it, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The play of *The Famous Victories of Henry V.* Holinshed's *Chronicles.* (Possibly) an earlier play, now lost.

The Fable. The play describes the determination of Henry V to fight with France, his progress in France, the battle of Agincourt, the articles of peace between the French and English, and the courtship of the King with Katharine, daughter of the French King. It is a chronicle of the coming, seeing, and conquering of the "fellow" "whose face was not worth sun-burning."

The play bears every mark of having been hastily written. Though it belongs to the great period of Shakespeare's creative life, it contains little either of clash of character, or of that much tamer thing, comparison of character. It is a chronicle or procession,

eked out with soldiers' squabbles. It seems to have been written to fill a gap in the series of the historical plays. Perhaps the management of the Globe Theatre, where the play was performed, wished to play the series through, from *Richard II* to *Richard III*, and persuaded Shakespeare to write this play to link *Henry IV* to *Henry VI*. The lines of the epilogue show that Shakespeare meant the play to give an image of worldly success between the images of failure in the other plays.

The play ought to be seen and judged as a part of the magnificent tragic series. Detached from its place, as it has been, it loses all its value. It is not greatly poetical in itself. It is popular. It is about a popular hero who is as common as those who love him. But in its place it is tremendous. Henry V is the one commonplace man in the eight plays. He alone enjoys success and worldly happiness. He enters Shakespeare's vision to reap what his broken-hearted father sowed. He passes out of Shake-

speare's vision to beget the son who dies broken-hearted after bringing all to waste again.

"Hear him but reason in divinity,"

cries the admiring archbishop. Yet this searcher of the spirit woos his bride like a butcher, and jokes among his men like a groom. He has the knack of life that fits human beings for whatever is animal in human affairs.

His best friend, Scroop, plots to kill him, but is detected and put to death. Henry accuses Scroop of cruelty and ingratitude. He forgets those friends whom his own cruelty has betrayed to death and dishonour. Falstaff dies broken-hearted. Bardolph, whose faithfulness redeems his sins, is hanged. Pistol becomes a cutpurse. They were the prince's associates a few months before. He puts them from his life with as little feeling as he shows at Agincourt, when he orders all the prisoners to be killed.

He has a liking for knocks. Courage tempered by stupidity (as in the persons of

Fluellen, etc.) is what he loves in a man. He, himself, has plenty of his favourite quality. His love of plainness and bluntness makes him condemn sentiment in his one profound speech—

"All other devils that suggest by treasons
Do botch and bungle up damnation
With patches, colours, and with forms being fetch'd
From glistering semblances of piety."

The scenes between Nym and Pistol, and the account of Falstaff's death, are the last of the great English scenes. This (or the next) was Shakespeare's last English play, for Lear and Cymbeline are British, not English. When he laid down his pen after writing the epilogue to this play he had done more than any English writer to make England sacred in the imaginations of her sons.

The Merry Wives of Windsor.

Written. 1599 (?)

Published, in a mutilated form, 1602; in a complete form, 1623.

Source of the Plot. A tale in Straparola's *Notti* (iv. 4).

Tarleton's *News out of Purgatorie.* Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone.* Kinde Kit of Kingston's *Westward for Smelts.*

The Fable. Falstaff makes love to Mistress Ford, the wife of a Windsor man. Mistress Ford, despising Falstaff, plots with her friend, Mrs. Page, to make him a mock. News of Falstaff's passion is brought to Ford, who, needlessly jealous, resolves to search the house for him.

Falstaff woos Mrs. Ford. She holds him in play till she hears that her husband is coming. Falstaff, alarmed at his approach, bundles into a clothes basket, is carried past the unsuspecting husband, and soused in the river.

He is gulled into the belief that Mrs. Ford expects him again. He goes, is nearly caught by Ford, but escapes, disguised as an old woman, at the cost of a cudgelling.

Still believing in Mrs. Ford's love for him, he keeps a third assignation, this time in Windsor Forest, in the disguise of Herne the hunter. On this occasion he is pinched and scorched by little children disguised as fairies. He learns that Mrs. Ford has tricked him, is mocked by all, and then forgiven.

The play is eked out by other actions. Chief of these is the wooing of Anne Page, Mrs. Page's daughter, by three men — a foreigner, Dr. Caius; an idiot, Master Slender; and the man of her heart, Fenton. There are also scenes between Falstaff, Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol, and between Dr. Caius, Sir Hugh Evans, Shallow, Slender, the Host and Mrs. Quickly.

An old tradition says that this play was written in a fortnight by command of Queen Elizabeth. There can be no doubt (*a*) that it was written hurriedly, (*b*) that it nicely suited the Tudor sense of humour. It is the least interesting of the genuine plays.

It is almost wholly the work of the abundant instinctive self working in the high spirits that so often come with the excitement of hurry. None of the characters has time for thought. The play is full of external energy. The people bustle and hurry with all their animal natures.

It is the only Shakespearean play which treats exclusively of English country society. As a picture of that Society it is true and telling. Country society alters very little. It is the enduring stem on which the cities graft fashions. It is given to few to see English country society so much excited as it is in this play, but drama deals with excessive life. Shakespeare's people are always intensely excited or interested or passionate. Each play tells of the great moments in half-a-dozen lives. The method of this play is the same, though the lives chosen are lower and the interests stupider. Falstaff is interested in cuckoldry, Mrs. Ford in mockery, Ford, Evans and Caius in jealousy and rivalry, Bardolph is going to be a tapster, the

others are plying their suits. Even in this his most trivial play, Shakespeare's idea that punishment follows oath-breaking is expressed (whimsically enough) by Falstaff—

"I never prospered since I forswore myself at primero."

His other idea, that obsession is a danger to life, is expressed later in the words—

"See now, how wit may be made a Jack-a-Lent, when 'tis upon ill employment."

There is little poetry in the play. The most poetical passage is the account of Herne the hunter—

"There is an old tale goes, that Herne the Hunter,
Some time a keeper here in Windsor Forest,
Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,
Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;
And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle;
And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
In a most hideous and dreadful manner."

Modern poets would describe Herne's dress and appearance. The creative poet describes his actions.

It is possible that when this play was written Shakespeare had thoughts of consecrating himself to the writing of purely English plays. There are signs that he had reached a point of achievement that is always a critical point to imaginative men. He had reached the point at which the personality is exhausted. He had worked out his natural instincts, the life known to him, his predilections, his reading. He had found a channel in which his thoughts could express themselves. Writing was no longer so pleasant to him as it had been. He had done an incredible amount of work in a few years. The personality was worn to a husk. It may be that a very little would have kept him on this side of the line, writing imitations of what he had already done. He was at the critical moment which separates the contemplative from the visionary, the good from the excellent, the great from the supreme. All writers,

according to their power, come to this point. Very few have the fortune to get beyond it. Shakespeare's mind stood still for a moment, in this play and in the play that followed, before it went on triumphant to the supreme plays.

As You Like It.

Written. (?)

Published. 1600 (?)

Source of the Plot. Thomas Lodge's novel of *Rosalynde*, Euphues' *Golden Legacie* (published in 1590), supply the fable. The tale is that tale of Gamelyn, wrongly attributed to Chaucer. The *Practise* (Saviolo's "Practise") of Vincentio Saviolo, an Italian master of arms, gave hints for Touchstone's account of the lie. The rest of the play seems to have been the fruit of Shakespeare's invention.

The Fable. Orlando, basely used by his elder brother Oliver, leaves home, annoys the usurping Duke Frederick, and is advised to leave the country.

Rosalind, child of the rightful Duke, and Celia, the child of Duke Frederick, fly from home together in search of the rightful Duke, who has taken to the wild wood. Rosalind, dressed as a man, gives out that Celia is her sister. They set up as shepherds in Arden.

Orlando joins the rightful Duke in Arden. He is in love with Rosalind. He meets her in the forest, but does not recognise her in her disguise. Oliver, cast out by Frederick, comes to Arden, is reconciled to Orlando, and falls in love with Celia. There are a few passages of the comedy of mistake, due to Rosalind's disguise. In the end, the rightful Duke and Oliver are restored to their

possessions. Orlando marries Rosalind; the minor characters are married as their hearts desire, and all ends happily.

The play treats of the gifts of Nature and the ways of Fortune. Orlando, given little, is brought to much. Rosalind and Celia, born to much, are brought to little. The Duke, born to all things, is brought to nothing. The usurping Duke, born to nothing, climbs to much, desires all, and at last renounces all. Oliver, born to much, aims at a little more, loses all, and at last regains all. Touchstone, the worldly wise, marries a fool. Audrey, born a clown, marries a courtier. Phebe, scorning a man, falls in love with a woman.

Jaques, the only wise one, is the only one not moved by Fortune. Life does not interest him; his interest is in his thoughts about life. His vision of life feasts him whatever life does. Passages in the second act, in the subtle seventh scene, corrupt in a most important line, show that in the character of Jaques Shakespeare was expounding a philosophy of art. The philosophy may not have

been that by which he, himself, wrought; but it is one set down by him with an extreme subtlety of care, and opposed, as all opinions advanced in drama must be, by an extreme earnestness of opposition.

The wisest of Shakespeare's characters are often detached from the action of the play in which they appear. Jaques holds aloof from the action of this play, though he is perhaps the best-known character in the cast. His thought is the thought of all wise men, that wisdom, being always a little beyond the world, has no worldly machinery by which it can express itself. In this world the place of chorus, interpreter or commentator, is not given to the wise man, but to the fool who has degraded the office to a profession. Jaques, the wise man, finds the place occupied by one whose comment is attitude. Wisdom has no place in the social scheme. The fool, he finds, has both office and uniform.

Seeing this, Jaques wishes, as all wise men wish, not to be counted wise but to have

as great liberty as the fool to express his thought—

"weed your better judgments
Of all opinion that grows rank in them
That I am wise. I must have liberty
Withal, as large a charter as the wind,
To blow on whom I please; for so fools have.
. . . give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine."

He is answered that, having learned of the world's evil by libidinous living, he can only do evil by exposing his knowledge. He replies, finely expressing Shakespeare's invariable artistic practice, that his aim will be at sin, not at particular sinners.

In the middle of his speech Orlando enters, raging for food. It is interesting to see how closely Shakespeare follows Jaques' mind in the presence of the fierce animal want of hunger. He is too much interested to be

of help. The Duke ministers to Orlando. Jaques wants to know "of what kind this cock should come of." He speaks banteringly, the Duke speaks kindly. The impression given is that Jaques is heartless. The Duke's thought is "here is one even more wretched than ourselves." Jaques' thought, always more for humanity than for the individual, is a profound vision of the world.

The play is a little picture of the world. The contemplative man who is not of the world, is yet a part of the picture. We are shown a company of delightful people, just escaped from disaster, smilingly taking the biggest of hazards. The wise man, dismissing them to their fates with all the authority of wisdom, gives up his share in the game to listen to a man who has given up his share of the world. Renunciation of the world is attractive to all upon whom the world presses very heavily, or very lightly.

Rosalind and Phebe are of the two kinds of woman who come much into Shakespeare's early and middle plays. Rosalind, like Portia,

is a golden woman, a daughter of the sun, smiling-natured, but limited. Phebe, like Rosalind, is black-haired, black-eyed, black-eyebrowed, with the dead-white face that so often goes with cruelty. Shortly after this play was written he began to create types less external and less limited.

Much Ado about Nothing.

Written. (?)

Published. 1600.

Source of the Plot. The greater part of the fable seems to have been invented by Shakespeare. The Hero and Claudio story is found in the twenty-second novel of Bandello, and in at least three other books (one of them Spenser's *Faerie Queene*). It was also known to the Elizabethans in a play now lost.

The Fable. Benedick, a lord of Padua, pledges himself to bachelorhood. Beatrice, a disdainful lady, is scornful of men.

Claudio plans to marry Hero.

Don John, enemy of Claudio, plans to thwart the marriage by letting it appear that Hero is unchaste.

Don Pedro and Claudio make Benedick believe that Beatrice is dying of love for him.

Ursula and Hero make Beatrice believe that Benedick is dying of love for her.

The disdainful couple make friends. Don John thwarts the marriage of Claudio by his tale of Hero's unchastity. Claudio casts off Hero at the altar. Hero swoons, and is conveyed away as dead. Beatrice and Benedick are

brought into close alliance by their upholding of Hero's cause.

Proof is obtained that Hero has been falsely accused. She is recovered from her swoon. Claudio marries her. Benedick and Beatrice plight troth.

¶ In this play Shakespeare writes of the power of report, of the thing overheard, to alter human destiny. ¶ Antonio's man, listening behind a hedge, overhears Don Pedro telling Claudio that he will woo Hero. The report of his eavesdropping conveys no notion of the truth, and leads, no doubt, to a bitter moment for Hero. Borachio, hiding behind the arras, overhears the truth of the matter. The report of his eavesdropping leads to the casting off of Hero at the altar. Don John and Borachio vow to Claudio that they overheard Don Pedro making love to Hero. The report gives Claudio a bitter moment. Benedick, reporting to the same tune, intensifies his misery.

Benedick, overhearing the report of Beatrice's love for him, changes his mind about marriage. Beatrice, hearing of Benedick's love for her, changes her mind about men.

Claudio, hearing Don John's report of Hero, changes his mind about his love. The watch, overhearing Borachio's report of his villainy, are able to change the tragedy to comedy. Leonato, hearing Claudio's report of Hero, is ready to cast off his child. Report is shown to be stronger than any human affection and any acquired quality, except the love of one unmarried woman for another, and that strongest of all earthly things, the fool in authority. The wisdom of Shakespeare is greater and more various than the brains of little men can imagine. It is one of the tragical things, that this great man, who interpreted the ways of fate in glorious, many-coloured vision, should be set aside in our theatres for the mockers and the accusers, whose vision scatters dust upon the brain and sand upon the empty heart.

¶ Though the play is not one of the most passionate of the plays, it belongs to Shakespeare's greatest creative period. It is full of great and wonderful things. The character-drawing is so abundant and precise that

those who know how hard it is to convey the illusion of character can only bow down, thankful that such work may be, but ashamed that it no longer is. Every person in the play is passionately alive about something. The energy of the creative mood in Shakespeare filled all these images with a vitality that interests and compels. The wit and point of the dialogue—

Don Pedro. I think this is your daughter.

Leonato. Her mother hath many times told me so.

Benedick. Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

Leonato. Signior Benedick, no; for then you were a child;

or (as in the later passage)—

Beatrice. I may sit in a corner and cry heigh ho for a husband.

Don Pedro. Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

Beatrice. I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your Grace ne'er a brother like you? Your father got excellent husbands, if a maid could come by them.

Don Pedro. Will you have me, lady?

Beatrice. No, my lord, unless I might have another for working days: your Grace is too costly to wear every day—

is plain to all; but it is given to few to see with what admirable, close, constructive art this dialogue is written for the theatre. Of poetry, of understanding passionately put, there is comparatively little. The one great poetical scene is that at the opening of the fifth act. The worst lines of this scene have become proverbial; the best are

"'tis all men's office to speak patience
To those that wring under the load of sorrow,
But no man's virtue nor sufficiency,
To be so moral when he shall endure
The like himself."

There is little in the play written thus, but there are many scenes throbbingly alive. The scene in the church shows what power to understand the awakened imagination has. The scene is a quivering eight minutes in as many lives. Shakespeare passes from thrill-

ing soul to thrilling soul with a touch as delicate as it is certain.

Shakespeare's fun is liberally given in the comic scenes. In the last act there is a beautiful example of the effect of lyric to heighten a solemn occasion.

Twelfth Night.

Written. 1600 (?)

Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The story of Orsino, Viola, Olivia and Sebastian is to be found in the "Historie of Apolonius and Silla" as told by Barnabe Riche in the book *Riche his Farewell to Militarie Profession.* Riche took the tale from Bandello's Italian, or from de Belleforest's French translation from it. Three-sixteenth century Italian plays are based on this fable. All of these sources may have been known to Shakespeare.

The sub-plot, and the characters contained in it, seem to be original creations.

The Fable. Viola, who thinks that she has lost her brother Sebastian by shipwreck, disguises herself as a boy, and calls herself Cesario. She takes service with the Duke Orsini, who is in love with the lady Olivia. She carries love messages from the Duke to Olivia.

Olivia, who is in mourning for her brother, refuses the Duke's suit, but falls in love with Cesario.

In her house is Malvolio, the steward, who reproves her uncle, Sir Toby Belch, for rioting at night with trivial companions. The trivial companions forge a letter, which causes Malvolio to think that his mistress is in love with him. The

thought makes his behaviour so strange that he is locked up as a madman.

Sir Toby Belch finds further solace for life in making his gull, Sir Andrew, challenge Cesario to a duel. The duel is made dangerous by the sudden appearance of Sebastian, who is mistaken for Cesario. He beats Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, and encounters the lady Olivia. Olivia woos him as she has wooed Cesario, but with better fortune.

They are married. The Duke marries Viola. Malvolio is released from prison. Sir Toby marries Maria, Olivia's waiting-woman. Sir Andrew is driven out like a plucked pigeon. Malvolio, unappeased by his release, vows to be revenged for the mock put upon him.

This is the happiest and one of the loveliest of all the Shakespearean plays. It is the best English comedy. The great mind that mixed a tragedy of intellect with a tragedy of stupidity, here mixes mirth with romantic beauty. The play is so mixed with beauty that one can see it played night after night, week after week, without weariness, even in a London theatre.

The play presents images of self-deception, or delusional sentimentality, by means of a romantic fable and a vigorous fable. It shows us three souls suffering from the kind of sickly vanity that feeds on day-dreams.

Orsino is in an unreal mood or emotion. Love is an active passion. Orsino is in the clutch of its dangerous passive enemy called sentimentality. He lolls upon a couch to music when he ought to be carrying her glove to battle. Olivia is in an unreal mood of mourning for her brother. Grief is a destroying passion. Olivia makes it a form of self-indulgence, or one sweet the more to attract flies to her. Malvolio is in an unreal mood of self-importance. Long posing at the head of ceremony has given him the faith that ceremony, of which he is the head, is the whole of life. This faith deludes him into a life of day-dreams, common enough among inactive clever people, but dangerous to the indulger, as all things are that distort the mental vision. At the point at which the play begins the day-dream has brought him to the pitch of blindness necessary for effective impact on the wall.

The only cure for the sickly in the mind is reality. Something real has to be felt or experienced. Life that is over-delicate and

remote through something unbalanced in the mind is not life but decay. The knife, the bludgeon, the practical joke, and the many-weaponed figure of Sorrow are life's remedies for those who fail to live. We are the earth's children; we have no business in limbo. Living in limbo is like living in the smoke from a crater: highly picturesque, but too near death for safety.

Orsino is cured of sentiment by the sight of Sebastian making love like a man. He rouses to do the like by Viola. Olivia is piqued out of sentiment by coming to know some one who despises her. She falls in love with that person. Malvolio is mocked out of sentiment by the knowledge that other minds have seen his mind. He has not the happiness to be rewarded with love at the end of the play; but he has the alternative of hate, which is as active a passion and as real. All three are roused to activity by the coming of something real into their lives; and all three, in coming to the active state, cease to be interesting and beautiful and pathetic.

Shakespeare's abundant power created beings who look before and after, even while they keep vigorous a passionate present. It is difficult to praise that power. Even those who know how difficult art is find it hard to praise perfect art. Art is not to be praised or blamed, but understood. This play will stand as an example of perfect art till a greater than Shakespeare set a better example further on. It is

"All beauty and without a spot."

The scene of the roisterers, rousing the night-owl in a catch, rouses the heart, as all real creation does, with the thought that life is too wonderful to end. The next, most lovely scene, where the Duke and Viola talk of love that keeps life from ending, and so often brings life down into the dust, assures the heart that even if life ends for us it will go on in others.

"the song we had last night.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun

And the free maids that weave their thread
with bones
Do use to chant it: it is silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love,
Like the old age."

In his best plays Shakespeare used a double construction to express by turn the twofold energy of man, the energy of the animal and of the spirit. The mind that brooded sadly in

"For women are as roses, whose fair flower
Being once display'd, doth fall that very
hour"

and in

"She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in
thought,"

belonged to earth, and got a gladness from earth. Within two minutes of the talk of the woman who died of love he showed Contemplation making a rare turkey-cock of the one wise man in his play.

All's Well that Ends Well.

Written. (?)
Published. 1623.

Source of the Plot. The story of Helena's love for Bertram is found in the *Decamerone* of Boccaccio (giorn. 3, nov. 9). Shakespeare may have read it in the *Palace of Pleasure.*

The Fable. Helena, orphan daughter of a physician, has been brought up, as a dependant, in the house of the Countess of Rousillon. She falls in love with Bertram, the son of the Countess and the King's ward.

Bertram goes to the French Court, on his way to the wars. He finds the King dangerously ill. Helena, hearing of the King's illness, comes to the Court as a physician. She offers to cure the King with one of her father's remedies, on condition that, when cured, he will give her in marriage the man of her choice. The King accepts these conditions; she cures him; she chooses for her husband Bertram.

Bertram, the King's ward, has to do the King's bidding. He grudgingly accepts her; they are married. He leaves her, and goes to the wars in the service of the Duke of Florence, designing to see her no more. Helena withdraws from the Countess's house, and comes to Florence disguised.

Bertram woos Diana, a maid of Florence. Helena impersonates her, receives her unsuspecting husband at night, takes from him a ring, and gives, in exchange, a ring given to her by the King of France. At the end of the war, Bertram, hearing that Helena is dead, returns to France, wearing the ring. The King sees it and challenges it. Bertram can give no just account of how he got it. Helena, quick with child by him, confronts him, with the ring that he left with her at Florence. Diana, the Florentine maid, gives evidence that Helena impersonated her on the night of Ber-

tram's visit at Florence. Bertram accepts Helena as his wife, and the play ends happily.

This play (whenever written) was extensively revised during the ruthless mood that gave birth to *Measure for Measure*. The alterations were made in a mood so much deeper than the mood of its first composition that they make the play uneven. Something, perhaps some trick of health, that made the mind clearer than the imagination, gave to Shakespeare for a short time another (and pitiless) view of human obsessions.

It was a part of his belief that treachery is generally caused by blindness, blindness generally by some obsession of passion. In this play he treats of the removal of an obsession by making plain to the obsessed, by pitiless judicial logic, the ugliness of the treachery it causes.

Bertram is a young man fresh from home. He does not want to marry. He is eager to see the world and to win honour. He has been accustomed to look down on Helena as a poor dependant. He does not like her, and

he does not like being ordered. He is suddenly ordered to marry her. He has been trapped by a woman's underhand trick. He sees himself brought into bondage with all the plumes of his youth clipped close. There is no way of escape; he has to marry her; but the King's order cannot quench his rage against the woman who has so snared him. His rage burns inward into a brooding, rankling ill-humour that becomes an obsession. It is one of the tragedies of life that an evil obsession blinds the judgment on more sides than one. The obsessed are always without criticism. A way of destruction may be as narrow as a way of virtue; but all the other ways of destruction run into it. Bertram in blinkers to the good in Helena is blind to the faults in himself and in Parolles his friend. Wilfully, as the sullen do, he thinks himself justified in doing evil because evil has been done to him. Hot blood is running in him. Temptation, never far from youth, is always near the unbalanced. He takes an unworthy confidant, as the obsessed do, and goes

in over the ears. His sin is the giving of salutation to sportive blood, it is love, it is "natural rebellion," it is young man's pastime. But looked at coldly and judicially, with the nature of the confidant laid bare, and the lies of the sinner made plain, it is an ugly thing. Passion is sweet enough to seem truth, the only truth. Let the eyes be opened a little, and it will blast the heart with horror. What man thought true is then seen to be this, this thing, this devil of falseness who gives man this kind of friend, makes him tell this kind of lie, and brands him with this kind of shame.

Shakespeare is just to Bertram. The treachery of a woman is often the cause of a man's treachery to womanhood. Helena's obsession of love makes her blind to the results of her actions. She twice puts the man whom she loves into an intolerable position, which nothing but a king can end. The fantasy is not made so real that we can believe in the possibility of happiness between two so married. Helena has been praised as one of

the noblest of Shakespeare's women. Shakespeare saw her more clearly than any man who has ever lived. He saw her as a woman who practises a borrowed art, not for art's sake, nor for charity, but, woman fashion, for a selfish end. He saw her put a man into a position of ignominy quite unbearable, and then plot with other women to keep him in that position. Lastly, he saw her beloved all the time by the conventionally minded of both sexes.

The play is full of effective theatrical situations. It contains much fine poetry. Besides the poetry there are startling moments of insight—

"My mother told me just how he would woo
As if she sat in 's heart. . . ."

"Now, God delay our rebellion! as we are ourselves,
What things are we! Merely our own traitors."

"I would gladly have him see his company anatomised,
That he might take a measure of his own judgments."

"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together."

"Our rash faults
Make trivial price of serious things we have,
Not knowing them until we know their grave:
Oft our displeasures, to ourselves unjust,
Destroy our friends and after weep their dust."

Julius Caesar.

Written. 1601(?)
Produced. (?)
Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The Lives of Antonius, Brutus and Julius Cæsar in Sir Thomas North's *Plutarch.*

A tragedy of Julius Cæsar, now lost, was performed by Shakespeare's company in 1594. Shakespeare must have known this play.

The Fable. Cassius, fearing that Julius Cæsar is about to extinguish all trace of Republican rule in Rome, persuades Brutus and others to plot a change. They decide to murder Cæsar.

On the morning chosen for the murder, Cæsar is warned by many omens not to stir abroad. He is persuaded to ignore the omens. He goes to the Senate House, and is there killed. Mark Antony, his friend, obtains leave from the murderers to make a public oration over the corpse.

In his speech he so inflames the populace against the murderers that they are compelled to leave Rome.

Joining himself to Octavius, he takes the field against Brutus and Cassius, and helps to defeat them at Philippi.

Cassius is killed by his servant when he sees that all is lost. Brutus, seeing the battle go against him, kills himself.

The modern play climbs to its culmination by a series of interruptions or crises. The modern playwright tries to end his acts at an arresting or splendid moment, artfully delayed, and carefully prepared. He tries to end his play by a gradual knitting together of all the energies of his characters into a situation, happier or more haunting, than any that has preceded it in the course of the action. The art by which this is done, when it is done, is called dramatic construction. There are many kinds of dramatic construction. Each age tends to form a new one. Each writer uses many. In art a subject can only be expressed in the form most fitting to it. In the art of the theatre a mistake in the choice of the form, or in the right handling of it when chosen leads infallibly to the irritation of the audience and the failure of the play. When a play is badly constructed the actors cannot so interpret the author's emotion that it

will dominate the collective emotion in the audience.

It is often said, by those who ought to know better (it was said to Racine by Frenchmen) that dramatic construction cannot matter, if the passion or spirit with which the author writes, be abundant and sincere. The powder in a cartridge may be abundant and the bullet at the end may be sincerely meant, yet neither will do execution till they are put properly into the proper weapon, rightly aimed, and judgingly fired. So with passion in the arts. Without art, inspiration is breath and a feeding of the wind. In the theatre, inspiration without art is as a sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal.

It is sometimes maintained in print, by those saddened or maddened by bad modern performances of the plays, that Shakespeare "could not construct," that he is constantly "rambling," "chaotic," or "intolerable," and that he is only played to-day because of his "poetry." Those who maintain these things forget that an Elizabethan play was

constructed for a theatre much unlike the modern theatre, and performed in a manner suited to that theatre, but less well suited to the theatre of our times. Shakespeare's plays were constructed closely and carefully to be effective on the Elizabethan stage. On that stage they were highly and nobly effective. On the modern stage, produced in the modern manner, they are less effective. There are many reasons why they should be less effective on the modern stage. During the last thirty years there has been a tendency towards naturalism in the theatre. Modern audiences have learned not to care for poetry on the stage unless it is made "natural" by realistic scenery. Modern audiences are accustomed to the modern forms of dramatic construction, which are unlike the Elizabethan forms. They know that modern playwrights put a strong scene at the end of an act and a great scene at the end of the play. They have learned to expect a play to be arranged in that manner, and to count as ill constructed the play not so arranged. As it is frequently

said that the last acts of *Julius Cæsar* make anti-climax and spoil the play, it is necessary to consider Shakespeare's constructive practice in this and in some other plays.

The Greek tragic poets ended the action of their plays in the modern manner, at the great scene, but, unlike us, they delayed the departure of the audience for some minutes more, generally by a chorus of men and women who expounded the moral value of the action in noble verse. The audience came away calmed. If a Greek had constructed *Julius Cæsar*, he would have ended the action at the murder. A chorus of senators would then have chanted something noble about the results of pride, the vanity of human glory, and the strangeness of the ways of the gods. A modern writer would have caused the curtain to fall at the murder, for to-day, when the brains are out the play dies and there an end. Shakespeare carries on his play for two acts after Cæsar is dead. In *Macbeth* he constructs the last half of his play in much the same manner.

In both plays he is considering the conception, the doing, and the results of a violent act. In both plays this act is the murder of the head of a State. In neither case is he deeply interested in the victim. Duncan, in *Macbeth*, is a generous gentleman; Cæsar, in this play, is a touchy man of affairs whose head is turned. Shakespeare's imagination broods on the fact that the killers were deluded into murder, Macbeth by an envious wife and the belief that Fate meant him to be king, Brutus by an envious friend and the belief that he was saving Rome. In both cases the killers show base personal ingratitude and treachery. In both plays, an avenging justice makes even the scales. The mind of the poet follows them from the moment when the guilty thought is prompted, through the agony and exultation of dreadful acts, to the unhappiness that dogs the treacherous, till Fate's just sword falls in vengeance. His imagination is most keenly stirred just as ours is, by the great event, the murder of the victim: but his subject is not the murder,

nor yet the tragical end of a ruler. His subject in both plays is the working of Fate who prompts to murder, uses the murderer, and then destroys him. We are interested in crisis and in topic. The Elizabethans, with a wider vision, could not detach an act from its place in the pageant of history. In a modern play the heroine is put into an unpleasant position, or an evil is exposed, or our faults are made visible and laughable. The point of view is that of the sympathiser, reformer, and moralist looking on from the window near by. The field of vision is restricted and the object brought near. In this great play, as in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare strove to present a violent act and its consequences from the point of view of a great just spirit outside life.

The play is generally considered to be the earliest of the supreme plays. Little more can be said of it at this time than that it is supreme. There is a majesty in the conception that makes it like gathering and breaking storm. The cause of the murder is a great personal treachery inspired by an unselfish

idea. Though it seems inevitable, it is a very little thing that makes it possible. Both Cæsar's murder and Brutus' downfall are almost prevented. A hand stretches out to save both of them. A little domestic treachery inspired by a selfish idea puts aside the interposing hand in both instances. Cæsar will not listen to his wife because he is sure of himself. Brutus will not answer his wife for the same reason. They go on to the magnificent hour which makes the one fine soul in the play a haunted and unhappy soul till he snatches at Death at Philippi.

The verse is calm, like the noble art that shapes the scenes. It is full of majesty. Lines occur in which single unusual words are charged with an incalculable power of meaning.

"Against the Capitol I met a lion,
Who glazed upon me and went surly by."

"It is the bright day that brings forth the adder."

Shakespeare's intensest and most solemn thought, the Law that directed the creation

of some of his greatest work, is spoken by Brutus—

"Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream:
The Genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council, and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection."

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

Written. 1601–2.

Published, in an imperfect form, 1603; more perfectly, 1604.

Source of the Plot. A play upon the subject of Hamlet, now lost, seems to have been popular in London during the last decades of the sixteenth century. Some think that it was an early work of Shakespeare's. No evidence supports this theory. He probably knew the play, and may have acted in it.

The story is told by Saxo Grammaticus in his *Historia Danica.* Francis de Belleforest printed a version of it in his *Histoires Tragiques.* An English translation from de Belleforest, called the *Hystorie of Hamblet,* was published (or perhaps reprinted) in London in 1608. Shakespeare seems to have known both de Belleforest and the *Hystorie.*

The Fable. Claudius, brother to the King of Denmark, conniving with Gertrude the Queen, poisons his brother, and seizes the throne. Soon afterwards he marries Gertrude. At this point the play begins.

Hamlet, son of the murdered king, sick at heart at his

mother's hasty re-marriage, and troubled by his love for Ophelia, returns to Denmark. The ghost of his father reveals the manner of the murder to him, and makes him swear to be revenged. The revelation so affects him that the murderers begin to fear him. He cannot bring himself to kill Claudius. In a play he shows them that he knows their guilt.

While speaking with his mother, he discovers and kills a spy hidden behind the arras. The spy is Polonius, father of Laertes and of Ophelia.

Claudius causes Hamlet to sail for England, on the pretext that the killing of Polonius has brought him into danger with the populace. He plans that Hamlet shall be killed on his arrival. Hamlet discovers the treacherous purpose and returns unhurt to Denmark.

During Hamlet's absence at sea, Laertes learns how Polonius was killed and swears to be revenged on Hamlet. Hamlet's return gives him his opportunity.

Claudius suggests that the revenge be taken at a fencing-bout. Laertes shall fence with Hamlet, using a poisoned foil. If this fails, Hamlet shall be given poisoned wine.

In a scuffle during the fencing-bout the fencers change foils. Gertrude, by mistake, drinks the poisoned wine and dies. Leartes, hurt by the poisoned foil, dies. Hamlet, also hurt by the poisoned foil, kills Claudius and dies too.

Hamlet is the most baffling of the great plays. It is the tragedy of a man and an action continually baffled by wisdom. The man is too wise. The dual action, pressing in both cases to complete an event, cannot get past his wisdom into the world. The action in one case is a bad one. It is simply

murder. In the other, and more important case, it is, according to our scheme, also a bad one. It is revenge, or, at best, the taking of blood for blood. In the Shakespearean scheme it is not revenge, it is justice, and therefore neither good nor bad but necessary. The situation which causes the tragedy is one very common in Shakespeare's system. Life has been wrenched from her course. Wrenching is necessary to bring her back to her course or to keep her where she is. Hamlet is a man who understands too humanly to wish to wrench either this way or that, and too shrewdly to be himself wrenched by grosser instruments of Fate.

The action consists in the baffling of action. Mostly, it consists in the baffling of life's effort to get back to her course. All through the play there is the uneasiness of something trying to get done, something from outside life trying to get into life, but baffled always because the instrument chosen is, himself, a little outside life, as the wise must be. This baffling of the purpose of the dead

leads to a baffling of the living, and, at last, to something like an arrest of life, a deadlock, in which each act, however violent, makes the obscuring of life's purpose greater.

The powers outside life send a poor ghost to Hamlet to prompt him to an act of justice. After baffled hours, often interrupted by cock-crow, he gives his message. Hamlet is charged with the double task of executing judgment and showing mercy. It is a charge given to many people (generally common people) in the system of the plays. It is given to two other men in this play. It is nothing more than the fulfilling of the kingly office, so bloodily seized by Claudius before the opening of the play. At this point, it may be well to consider the society in which the kingly office is to be exercised.

The society is created with Shakespeare's fullest power. It is not an image of the world in little, like the world of the late historical plays. It is an image of the world as intellect is made to feel it. It is a society governed by the enemies of intellect by the

sensual and the worldly, by deadly sinners and the philosophers of bread and cheese. The King is a drunken, incestuous murderer, who fears intellect. The Queen is a false woman, who cannot understand intellect. Polonius is a counsellor who suspects intellect. Ophelia is a doll without intellect. Laertes is a boor who destroys intellect. The courtiers are parasites who flourish on the decay of intellect. Fortinbras, bright and noble, marching to the drum to win a dunghill, gives a colour to the folly. The only friends of the wise man are Horatio, the schoolfellow, and the leader of a cry of players.

The task set by the dead is a simple one. All tasks are simple to the simple-minded. To the delicate and complex mind so much of life is bound up with every act that any violent act involves not only a large personal sacrifice of ideal, but a tearing-up by the roots of half the order of the world. Wisdom is founded upon justice; but justice, to the wise man, is more a scrupulous quality in the mind than the doing of expedient acts upon

sinners. Hamlet is neither "weak" nor "unpractical," as so many call him. What he hesitates to do may be necessary, or even just, as the world goes, but it is a defilement of personal ideals, difficult for a wise mind to justify. It is so great a defilement, and a world so composed is so great a defilement, that death seems preferable to action and existence alike.

The play at this point presents a double image of action baffled by wisdom. Hamlet baffles the dealing of the justice of Fate, and also the death plotted for him by his uncle. His weapon, in both cases, is his justice, his precise scrupulousness of mind, the niceness of mental balance which gives to all that he says the double-edge of wisdom. It is the faculty, translated into the finer terms of thought, which the ghost seeks to make real with bloodshed. Justice, in her grosser as in her finer form, is concerned with the finding of the truth. The first half of the play, though it exposes and develops the fable, is a dual image of a search for truth.

of a seeking for a certainty that would justify a violent act. The King is probing Hamlet's mind with gross human probes, to find out if he is mad. Hamlet is searching the King's mind with the finest of intellectual probes, to find out if he is guilty. The probe used by him, the fragment of a play within a play, is the work of a man with a knowledge of the impotence of intellect—

"Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown"—

and a faith in the omnipotence of intellect—

"Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own."

To this man, five minutes after the lines have exposed the guilty man, comes a chance to kill his uncle. Hamlet "might do it pat" while he is at prayers. The knowledge that the sword will not reach the real man, since damnation comes from within, not from without, arrests his hand. Fate offers an instant for the doing of her purpose. Hamlet puts the instant by, with his baffling

slowness, made up of mercy and wisdom. Fate, or the something outside life which demands the King's blood, so that life may go back to her channel, is foiled. The action cannot bring itself to be. A wise human purpose is, for the moment, stronger than the eternal purpose of Nature, the roughly just.

It is a part of this play's ironic teaching that life must not be baffled; but that, when she has been wrenched from her course, she must either be wrenched back to it or kept violently in the channel to which she has been forced.

In *Macbeth*, a not dissimilar play, the life violently altered is kept in the strange channel by a succession of violent acts. In *Hamlet*, when Hamlet's merciful wisdom has decided that the life violently altered shall not be wrenched back, his destroying wisdom decides that she shall not be kept in the strange channel. The King, just in his way, seeks to find out if Hamlet be sane. If Hamlet be sane, he must die. His death will

secure the King's position. By his death life will be kept in the strange channel. Polonius, the King's agent, learns that Hamlet is sane and something more. Fate demands violence this way if she may not have it in the other. She offers an instant for the doing of her purpose. Hamlet puts the instant by with his baffling swiftness, which strikes on the instant, when the Queen's honour and his own life depend on it. The first bout in this play of the baffling of action falls to Hamlet. The second bout, in which the King's purpose is again baffled, by the sending of the two courtiers to their death in England, also falls to Hamlet. The bloody purpose from outside life and the bloody purpose from within life are both baffled and kept from being by the two extremes so perfectly balanced in the wise nature.

Extremes in the Shakespearean system are tragical things. In Shakespeare, the pathway of excess leads, not as with Blake, to the palace of wisdom, but to destruction. The two extremes in Hamlet, of slowness

and swiftness, set up in life the counter forces which destroy extremes, so that life, the common thing, may continue to be common. The mercy of Hamlet leaves the King free to plot his death. The swiftness of Hamlet gives to the King a hand and sword to work his will.

In other plays, the working of extremes to the punishment dealt by life to all excess is simple and direct. In this play, nothing is simple and direct. Fate's direct workings are baffled by a mind too complex to be active on the common planes. The baffling of Fate's purpose leads to a condition in life like the "slack water" between tides. Laertes, when his father is killed, raises the town and comes raving to the presence to stab the killer. He is baffled by the King's wisdom. Ophelia, "incapable of her own distress," goes mad and drowns herself. The play seems to hesitate and stand still while the energies spilled in the baffling of Fate work and simmer and grow strong, till they combine with Fate in the preparation

of an end that shall not be baffled. Even so, "the end men looked for cometh not." The end comes to both actions at once in the squalor of a chance-medley. Fate has her will at last. Life who was so long baffled, only hesitated. She destroys the man who wrenched her from her course, and the man who would neither wrench her back nor let her stay, and the women who loved these men, and the men who loved them. Revenge and chance together restore life to her course, by a destruction of the lives too beastly, and of the lives too hasty, and of the lives too foolish, and of the life too wise, to be all together on earth at the same time.

¶ It is difficult to praise the poetry of *Hamlet*. Nearly all the play is as familiar by often quotation as the New Testament. The great, wise, and wonderful beauty of the play is a part of the English mind for ever. It is difficult to live for a day anywhere in England (except in a theatre) without hearing or reading a part of *Hamlet*. ¶ Lines that are little quoted are the lines to quote here—

"this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest."

"O proud death!
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes, at a shot,
So bloodily hast struck?"

The last speech, great as the speech at the end of Timon, and noble, like that, with a music beyond the art of voices, is constructed on a similar metrical basis.

"Let four captains
Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have proved most royally: and, for his passage,
The soldier's music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.
Take up the bodies: such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go, bid the soldiers shoot."

Troilus and Cressida.

Written. (?)
Produced. After publication.
Published. 1609.
Source of the Plot. Geoffrey Chaucer's poem of *Troilus*

and Cresside. John Lydgate's *Troy Boke,* William Caxton's translation of the French book of the *Recuyels of Troy.* George Chapman's translation of Homer's *Iliad.*

Among many other possible sources may be mentioned a now lost play of *Troilus and Cressida* (produced in 1599) by the poets Thomas Dekker and Henry Chettle.

The Fable. The scene is Troy. Cressida is a Trojan woman, whose father, Calchas, has gone over to the Greeks. She is beloved by the youth Troilus. Her uncle, Pandarus, seeks to bring her to accept Troilus. Hector, brother to Troilus, challenges a Greek champion to single combat.

In the Greek camp there is much disaffection. Achilles, the chief Greek champion, conceiving himself wronged, makes a mock of the other leaders. To teach him his place the leaders plan that Ajax shall be chosen in his stead to take up Hector's challenge.

Pandarus succeeds in bringing Cressida to love Troilus.

Calchas, in the Greek camp, sends to Troy for Cressida. She is delivered over to the Greeks. Forgetting Troilus, she entangles one of the Greeks with her wiles.

Ajax takes up Hector's challenge. They fight a friendly bout and then go to feast, where the moody Achilles insults Hector.

The next day, Hector and Troilus come to the field, the one to avenge Achilles' insults, the other to kill the man who has won Cressida. Hector is cruelly and cowardly killed by Achilles. Troilus is left unhurt, cursing.

Troilus and Cressida is the dialogue scenario of a play that was never finished. It seems to have been written before 1608, then laid aside, incomplete, until the mood that inspired it had died. Conflicting evidence

makes it doubtful whether it was acted during Shakespeare's life. It was published, under mysterious circumstances, a year or two before he retired to Stratford.

Two or three scenes are finished. The rest is indicated in the crudest dialogue, written so hastily that it is often undramatic and nearly always without wit or beauty. The finished scenes are among the grandest ever conceived by Shakespeare, but the grandeur is that of thought, not of action. They make it plain to us why the play was never completed. The subject is this: a light woman throwing over a boy. The setting, the Trojan war: a light woman overthrowing a city, is so much bigger than the subject that it overshadows it. Another subject arises in the circumstance of the Trojan war. Achilles, the man of action, without honour or imagination, sulks. The wise man, Ulysses, suggests that he be brought from his sulks by mockery. The result of this wise counsel is that Hector, the one bright and noble soul in the play, is

killed cruelly and sullenly, by the boor thus mocked.

The two subjects and the setting are not and cannot be brought into unity. Shakespeare's mind wandered from his real subject to brood upon the obsession of Helen that betrayed Troy to the fire, and upon the tragical working of wisdom that brought about an end so foul. Other, and bigger, subjects for plays tempted him from the work. He put it aside before it was half alive. As it stands, it has neither life nor meaning. It oppresses the mind into making gloomy interpretation. Tragedy in its imperfect form cannot but be gloomy. It is nothing but the record of a fatal event. But Shakespearean tragedy is tragedy in its perfect form. It is an exultation of the soul over the husks of life and the winds that blow them. This play, had it ever been finished, would have been like the other tragedies of the great years. That it is not finished is our misfortune.

The finished scenes are full of wisdom—

"Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
A great-sized monster of ingratitude:
Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour'd
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
As done: perseverance, dear my lord,
Keeps honour bright: to have done, is to hang
Quite out of fashion."

"O, let not virtue seek
Remuneration for the thing it was."

"Those wounds heal ill that men do give themselves."

"And sometimes we are devils to ourselves."

Some have thought that this play was written by Shakespeare to ridicule the two poets, Ben Jonson (in the person of Ajax) and John Marston (in the person of Thersites). Those two poets were engaged, with others, in the years 1601–2, in what is called the War of the Theatres, that is, they wrote plays to criticise and mock each other. These plays are often scurrilous and seldom amus-

ing. During the course of the war the two chief combatants came to blows.

It is sad that Shakespeare should be credited with the paltriness of lesser men. His view of his task is expressed in *Timon of Athens* with the perfect golden clearness of supreme power—

> "my free drift
> Halts not particularly, but moves itself
> In a wide sea of wax: no levell'd malice
> Infects one comma in the course I hold;
> But flies an eagle flight, bold, and forth on,
> Leaving no tract behind."

He held that view throughout his creative life, as a great poet must. At the time during which this play was written his thought was more rigidly kept to the just survey of life than at any other period. Creative art has been so long inglorious that the practice and ideas of supreme poets have become incomprehensible to the many. This play is a great hint of something never, now, to be made clear. Those who count it a mark of Shakespeare's littleness expose their own.

Measure for Measure.

Written. 1603–4 (?)
Produced. (?)
Published. 1623.

Source of the Plot. The story is founded on an event that is said to have taken place in Ferrara, during the middle ages. Shakespeare took it from a collection of novels, the *Hecatomithi*, by Giraldi Cinthio; from the play, *The rare Historie of Promos and Cassandra*, founded on Cinthio's novel, by one George Whetstone, and from Whetstone's prose rendering of the story in his book *The Heptameron of Civil Discourses*.

The Fable. The Duke of Vienna, going on a secret mission, leaves his power in the hands of Angelo, a man of strict life.

Angelo enforces old laws against incontinence. He arrests Claudio and sentences him to be beheaded. Claudio's sister, Isabella, pleads with Angelo for her brother's life. Being moved to lust, Angelo tempts Isabella. He offers to spare Claudio if she will submit to him. Claudio begs her to save him thus. She refuses.

The Duke returns to Vienna disguised, hears Isabella's story, and resolves to entrap Angelo. He causes her to make an appointment to that end. He causes Mariana, a maid who has been jilted by Angelo, to personate Isabella, and keep the appointment. Mariana does so.

He contrives to check Angelo's treachery, that would have caused Claudio's death in spite of the submission.

Lastly he reveals himself, exposes Angelo's sin, compels him to marry Mariana, pardons Claudio, and makes Isabella his Duchess.

This play is now seldom performed. It is one of the greatest works of the greatest

English mind. It deals justly with the case of the man who sets up a lifeless sentimentality as a defence against a living natural impulse. The spirit of Angelo has avenged itself on Shakespeare by becoming the guardian spirit of the British theatre.

In this play Shakespeare seems to have brooded on the fact that the common prudential virtues are sometimes due, not to virtue, but to some starvation of the nature. Chastity may proceed from a meanness in the mind, from coldness of the emotions, or from cowardice, at least as often as from manly and cleanly thinking. Two kinds of chastity are set at clash here. The one springs from a fire in the personality that causes Isabella to think death better than contamination, and gives her that whiteness of generosity which fills nunneries with living sacrifice; the other comes from the niggardliness that makes Angelo jilt Mariana rather than take her without a dower. Both are obsessions; both exalt a part of life above life itself. Like other obsessions, they

come to grief in the presence of something real.

These two characters make the action. The play is concerned with the difficulty of doing justice in a world of animals swayed by rumour. The subject is one that occupied Shakespeare's mind throughout his creative life. Wisdom begins in justice. But how can man be just without the understanding of God? Who is so faultless that he can sit in judgment on another? Who so wise that he can see into the heart, weigh the act with the temptation, and strike the balance?

Sexual sin is the least of the sins in Dante. It is allied to love. It is an image of regeneration. No sin is so common, none is more glibly blamed. It is so easy to cry "treacherous," "base," and "immoral." But who, while the heart beats, can call himself safe from the temptation to this sin? It is mixed up with every generosity. It is a flood in the heart and a blinding wave over the eyes. It is the thorn in the side under

the cloak of the beauty of youth. In Shakespeare's vision it is a natural force incident to youth, as April is incident to the year. The young men live as though life were oil, and youth a bonfire to be burnt. Life is always wasteful. Youth is life's test for manhood. The clown finds in the prison a great company of the tested and rejected, calling through the bars for alms. In spite of all this choice, another victim is picked by tragical chance. Lucio, a butterfly of the brothel, a dirtier soul than Claudio, is spared. Claudio is taken and condemned. The beautiful, vain, high-blooded youth so quick with life and glad of the sun, is to lie in earth at the bidding of one less full of April.

Angelo, the man whose want of sympathy condemns Claudio, is in the state of security that precedes so much Shakespearean tragedy. He has received the name of being more than human because (unlike his admirers) he has not shown himself to be considerably less. He has come through youth unsinged. He has not been betrayed by his "gross body's

treason." Both he and those about him think that he is proof against temptation to sexual sin. Suddenly his security is swept away. He is betrayed by the subtler temptation that would mean nothing to a grosser man. He is moved by the sight of the beauty of a distressed woman's mind. The sight means nothing to Claudio, and less than nothing to Lucio. The happy animal nature of youthful man has a way of avoiding distressed women. The cleverer man, who has shut himself up in the half life of sentiment, cannot so escape. He is attacked suddenly by the unknown imprisoned side of him as well as by temptation. He falls, and, like all who fall, he falls not to one sin, but to a degradation of the entire man. The sins come linked. "Treason and murder ever kept together." When he is once involved with lust, treachery and murder follow. He is swiftly so stained that when the wise Duke shows him as he is, he shrinks from the picture, with a cry that he may be

out of the way by some swift merciful

death so that the horror of the knowledge of himself may end, too.

The play is a marvellous piece of unflinching thought. Like all the greatest of the plays, it is so full of illustration of the main idea that it gives an illusion of an infinity like that of life. It is constructed closely and subtly for the stage. It is more full of the ingenuities of play-writing than any of the plays. The verse and the prose have that smoothness of happy ease which makes one think of Shakespeare not as a poet writing, but as a sun shining.

". . . It deserves with characters of brass
A forted residence 'gainst the tooth of time."

The thought of the play is penetrating rather than impassioned. The poetry follows the thought. There are cold lines like Death laying a hand on the blood. The faultless lyric, "Take, O take those lips away" occurs. Some say Fletcher wrote it, some Bacon. "Love talks with better knowledge, and knowledge with dearer love." The music of the great manner rings—

"Merciful Heaven!
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Splitt'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the soft myrtle; but man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep."

The prose accompaniment to what is unrestrained in youth provides a cruel comedy.

Othello, the Moor of Venice.

Written. 1604 (?)

Published, in quarto, and in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The tale appears in *The Hecatomithi* of G. B. Giraldi Cinthio. Shakespeare follows Cinthio in the main; but a few details suggest that he knew the story in an ampler version.

The Fable. Iago, ensign to Othello, the Moor of Venice, is jealous of Cassio, his lieutenant. He plots to oust Cassio from the lieutenancy.

Othello marries Desdemona, and sails with her to the wars in Cyprus. Iago resolves to make use of Desdemona to cause Cassio's downfall.

He procures Cassio's discharge from the lieutenancy by involving him in a drunken brawl. Cassio beseeches Des-

demona to intercede with Othello for him. Iago hints to Othello that she has good reason to wish Cassio to be restored. He suggests that Cassio is her lover. Partly by fortune, partly by craft, he succeeds in establishing in Othello's mind the conviction that Desdemona is guilty.

Othello smothers Desdemona, learns, too late, that he has been deceived, and kills himself. Cassio's character is cleared. Iago is led away to torture.

A man's greatest works differ from his lesser works in degree, not in kind. They may be more perfect, but they express similar ideas. "A man grows, he does not become a different man." In this play of *Othello* the ideas are those that inspire nearly all the plays, that life seeks to preserve a balance, and that obsessions, which upset the balance, betray life to evil.

These ideas are in the earliest work of all, in *Venus and Adonis*. In *Othello* they are expressed with the variety and power of the great period. The obsession chosen for illustration is that of jealous suspicion. It is displayed at work in a mean mind and in a generous mind. The varying quality of its working makes the action of the play.

As in *The Merchant of Venice*, the chief

character is a man of intellect who has been warped out of humanity by the world's injustice. Iago is a man of fine natural intellect who has not been trained in the personal qualities that bring preferment. An educated man is advanced above him, as in life it happens. He broods over the injustice and schemes to be revenged. A groundless suspicion that the Moor has wronged him further, determines him to be revenged upon his employer as well as upon his supplanter. A weak intellect who comes to him for help serves him as a tool. He begins to persuade his employer that the supplanter and the newly-married wife are lovers.

He succeeds in this, through his natural adroitness, the working of chance, and the generosity of Othello, who has too much passion to be anything but blind under passionate influence like love or jealousy. The mean man's want of emotion keeps always the conduct of the vengeance precise and clear. Cassio is disgraced. Roderigo, having been fooled to the top of his bent, is

killed. Desdemona is smothered. Othello is ruined.

That working of an invisible judge, which we call Chance, "life's justicer," lays the villainy bare at the instant of its perfection. Emilia, Iago's wife, a common nature, with no more intelligence than a want of illusion, enters a moment too late to stay the slaughter, but too soon for Iago's purpose. She is the one person in the play certain to be loyal to Desdemona. She is the one person in the play who, judging from her feelings, will judge rightly. The finest part of the play is that scene in which her passionate instinct sees through the web woven about Othello by an intellect that has put aside all that is passionate and instinctive.

The influence and importance of the little thing in the great event is marked in this scene as in half-a-dozen other scenes in the greater tragedies. We are all or may at any time become immensely important to the play of the world. Had Emilia come a minute sooner or a minute later the end of the play

would have been very different. Desdemona would have lived to repent her marriage at leisure, or she would have gone to her grave branded.

Shakespeare brooded much upon all the tragedies of intellect. In this play, as in *Richard III* and *The Merchant of Venice*, he brooded upon the power of a warped intellect to destroy generous life. When he created Iago he wrote in a cooler spirit than when he created the earlier characters. Iago is therefore much more perfectly a living being but much less passionately alive than the soul burnt out at Bosworth, or the soul flouted in the Duke's Court. He is drawn with a sharp and wiry line. Like all sinister men, he tells nothing of himself. We see only his intellect. What he is in himself is as mysterious as life. Life is clear, up to a point, but beyond that point it is always baffling. Shakespeare's task was to look at life clearly. Looking at it clearly he was as baffled by what he saw, as we, who only see by his aid. He found in Iago an image like life itself, a power and

an activity, prompted by something secret and silent.

Much ink has been wasted about the "duration of time" in this play. The action of the play is one. It matters not if the time be divided into ten or fifty. In London and the University towns where writing is mostly practised, the play is seldom played. It is almost never played as Shakespeare meant it to be played. Those who write about it write after reading it. This is a reading age. Shakespeare's was an active age. That those who care most for his tragedies should be ignorant of the laws under which he worked is our misfortune and our fault and our disgrace.

The point is not insisted on; but some passages in the play suggest that when Shakespeare began to write it he was minded to make the action the falling of a judgment upon Desdemona for her treachery to her father. The treachery caused the old man's death. The too passionate and hasty things always bring death in these plays. Violent

delights have violent ends and bring violent ends to others.

The poetry of *Othello* is nearly as well known as that of *Hamlet*. Many quotations from the play have passed into the speech of the people. A play of intrigue does not give the fullest opportunity for great poetry; but supreme things are spoken throughout the action. Othello's cry—

"It is the very error of the moon.
She comes more near the earth than she was wont
And drives men mad,"

is one of the most perfect of all the perfect things in the tragedies.

King Lear.

Written. 1605–6.
Published. 1608.

Source of the Plot. The story of Lear is told in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, in a play by an unknown hand, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, and in a few stanzas of the tenth canto of the second Book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

The character of Gloucester seems to have been suggested by the character of a blind king in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*.

The Fable. King Lear, in his old age, determines to give up his kingdom to his three daughters. Before he does so, he tries to assure himself of their love for him. The two elder women, Goneril and Regan, vow that they love him intensely; the youngest, Cordelia, can only tell him that she cares for him as a daughter should. He curses and casts off Cordelia, who is taken to wife by the King of France.

Gloucester, deceived by his bastard Edmund, casts off Edgar his son.

King Lear, thwarted and flouted by Goneril and Regan, goes mad, and wanders away with his Fool. Gloucester, trying to comfort him against the wishes of Goneril and Regan, is betrayed by his bastard Edmund, and blinded. He wanders away with Edgar, who has disguised himself as a madman.

Regan's husband is killed. Seeking to take Edmund in his stead, she rouses the jealousy of Goneril, who has already made advances to him.

Cordelia lands with French troops to repossess Lear of his kingdom. She finds Lear, and comforts him. In an engagement with the sisters' armies, she and Lear are captured.

Edmund's baseness is exposed. He is attainted and struck down. Goneril poisons Regan, and kills herself. Edmund, before he dies, reveals that he has given order for Lear and Cordelia to be killed. His news comes too late to save Cordelia. She is brought in dead. Lear dies over her body.

Albany, Goneril's husband, Kent, Lear's faithful servant, and Edgar, Edmund's slayer, are left to set the kingdom in order.

The play of *King Lear* is based upon a fable and a fairy story. It illustrates the most terrible forms of treachery, that of

child against father, and father against child. It is the most affecting and the grandest of the plays.

The evil which makes the action springs from two sources, both fatal. One is the blindness or fatuity in Lear, which makes him give away his strength and cast out Cordelia. The other, equally deadly, but more cruel in its results, springs from an unrepented treachery, done long before by Gloucester, when he broke his marriage vows to beget Edmund. Memory of the sweetness of that treachery gives to Gloucester a blindness to the boy's nature, just as a sweetness, or ease, in the treachery of giving up the cares of kingship (against oath and the kingdom's good) helps to blind Lear to the natures of his daughters.

The blindness in the one case is sentimental, in the other wilful. Being established, fate makes use of it. One of the chief lessons of the plays is that man is only safe when his mind is perfectly just and calm. Any injustice, trouble or hunger in the mind delivers

man to powers who restore calmness and justice by means violent or gentle according to the strength of the disturbing obsession. This play begins at the moment when an established blindness in two men is about to become an instrument of fate for the violent opening of their eyes. The blindness in both cases is against the course of nature. It is unnatural that Lear should give his kingship to women, and that he should curse his youngest child. It is unnatural that Gloucester should make much of a bastard son whom he has hardly seen for nine years. It is deeply unnatural that both Lear and Gloucester should believe evil suddenly of the youngest, best beloved, and most faithful spirits in the play. As the blindness that causes the injustice is great and unnatural, so the working of fate to purge the eyes and restore the balance is violent and unnatural. Every person important to the action is thrust into an unnatural way of life. Goneril and Regan rule their father, commit the most ghastly and beastly cruelty, lust after the same man, and

die unnaturally (having betrayed each other), the one by her sister's hand, the other by her own. Lear is driven mad. The King of France is forced to war with his wife's sisters. Edmund betrays his half-brother to ruin and his father to blindness. Cornwall is stabbed by his servant. Edgar kills his half-brother. Gloucester, thrust out blind, dies when he finds that his wronged son loves him. Cordelia, fighting against her own blood, is betrayed to death by one who claims to love her sisters. The honest mild man, Albany, and the honest blunt man, Kent, survive the general ruin. Had Kent been a little milder and Albany a little blunter in the first act, before the fates were given strength, the ruin would not have been. All the unnatural treacherous evil comes to pass, because for a few fatal moments they were true to their natures.

The play is an excessive image of all that was most constant in Shakespeare's mind. Being an excessive image, it contains matter nowhere else given. It is all schemed and controlled with a power that he shows in no

other play, not even in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. The ideas of the play occur in many of the plays. Many images, such as the blasted oak, water in fury, servants insolent and servile, old honest men and young girls faithful to death, occur in other plays. That which each play added to the thought of the world is expressed in the single figure of some one caught in a net. Macbeth is a ruthless man so caught. Hamlet is a wise man so caught. Othello is a passionate and Antony a glorious man so caught. All are caught and all are powerless, and all are superb tragic inventions. King Lear is a grander, ironic invention, who hurts far more than any of these because he is a horribly strong man who is powerless. He is so strong that he cannot die. He is so strong that he nearly breaks the net, before the folds kill him.

No image in the world is so fierce with imaginative energy. The stormy soul runs out storming in a night of the soul as mad as the elements. With him goes the invention of the Fool, the horribly faithful fool, like

conscience or worldly wisdom, to flick him mad with ironic comment and bitter song.

The verse is as great as the invention. It rises and falls with the passion like music with singing. All the scale of Shakespeare's art is used; the terrible spiritual manner of

"You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,"

as well as the instinctive manner of a prose coloured to the height with all the traditions of country life.

Dramatic genius has the power of understanding half-a-dozen lives at once in tense, swiftly changing situations. This power is shown at its best in the last act of this play. One of the most wonderful and least praised of the inventions in the last scene is that of the dying Edmund. He has been treacherous to nearly every person in the play. His last treachery, indirectly the cause of his ruin, is still in act, the killing of Cordelia and the king. He has been stricken down. "The wheel has

come full circle." He has learned too late that

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us."

He can hardly hope to live for more than a few minutes. The death of his last two victims cannot benefit him. A word from him would save them. No one else can save them. Yet at the last minute, his one little glimmer of faithfulness keeps the word unspoken. He is silent for Goneril's sake. If he ever cared for any one in the world, except himself, he may have cared a little for Goneril. He thinks of her now. She has gone from him. But she is on his side, and he trusts to her, and acts for her. He waits for some word or token from her. He waits to see her save him or avenge him. The death of Lear will benefit her. It will be to her something saved from the general wreck, something to the good, in the losing bout. An impulse stirs him to speak, but he puts it by. He keeps silent about Lear, till one comes saying that Goneril has killed herself. Still he does not speak.

The news pricks the vanity in him. He strokes his plumes with a tender thought for the brightness of the life that made two princesses die for love of him. When he speaks of Lear, it is too late, the little, little instant which alters destiny has passed. Cordelia is dead. No mist stains the stone. She will come no more—

"Never, never, never, never, never."

The heart-breaking scene at the end has been blamed as "too painful for tragedy." Shakespeare's opinion of what is tragic is worth that of all his critics together. He gave to every soul in this play an excessive and terrible vitality. On the excessive terrible soul of Lear he poured such misery that the cracking of the great heart is a thing of joy, a relief so fierce that the audience should go out in exultation singing—

"O, our lives' sweetness!
That we the pain of death would hourly die
Rather than die at once!"

Tragedy is a looking at fate for a lesson in

deportment on life's scaffold. If we find the lesson painful, how shall we face the event?

Macbeth.

Written. 1605–6 (?)

Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. Raphael Holinshed tells the story of Macbeth at length in his *Chronicle of Scottish History.* He indicates the character of Lady Macbeth in one line.

When Shakespeare wrote the play, London was full of Scotchmen, brought thither by the accession of James I. Little details of the play may have been gathered in conversation.

The Fable. Macbeth, advised by witches that he is to be a king, is persuaded by his wife to kill his sovereign (King Duncan) and seize the crown. King Duncan, coming to Macbeth's castle for a night, is there killed by Macbeth and his lady. Duncan's sons fly to England. Macbeth causes himself to be proclaimed king.

Being king, he tries to assure himself of power by destroying the house of Banquo, of whom the witches prophesied that he should be the father of a line of kings. Banquo is killed; but his son escapes.

The witches warn Macbeth to beware of Macduff.

Macduff escapes to England, but his wife and children are killed by Macbeth's order.

Macduff persuades Duncan's son, Malcolm, to attempt the recovery of the Scottish crown.

Malcolm and Macduff make the attempt. They attack Macbeth and kill him.

Macbeth is one of the seven supreme Shakespearean plays. In the order of composition it is either the fourth or the fifth of the seven.

In point of merit it is neither greater nor less than the other six. It is different from them, in that it belongs more wholly to the kingdom of vision.

Like most Shakespearean tragedy, Macbeth is the tragedy of a man betrayed by an obsession. Cæsar is betrayed by an obsession of the desire of glory, Antony by passion, Tarquin by lust, Wolsey by worldly greed, Coriolanus and Timon by their nobleness, Angelo by his righteousness, Hamlet by his wisdom. All fail through having some hunger or quality in excess. Macbeth fails because he interprets with his worldly mind things spiritually suggested to him. God sends on many men "strong delusion, that they shall believe a lie." Othello is one such. Many things betray men. One strong means of delusion is the half-true, half-wise, half-spiritual thing, so much harder to kill than the lie direct. The sentimental treacherous things, like women who betray by arousing pity, are the dangerous things because their attack is made in the guise of great things.

Tears look like grief, sentiment looks like love; love feels like nobility; spiritualism seems like revelation.

Among these things few are stronger than the words spoken in unworldly states, in trance, in ecstasy, by oracles and diviners, by soothsayers, by the wholly excited people who are also half sane, by whoever obtains a half knowledge of the spirit by destruction of intellectual process.

> "to win us to our harm
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence."

Coming weary and excited from battle, on a day so strange that it adds to the strangeness of his mood, Macbeth hears the hags hail him with prophecy. The promise rankles in him. The seed scattered in us by the beings outside life comes to good or evil according to the sun in us. Macbeth, looking on the letter of the prophecy, thinks only of the letter of its fulfilment, till it becomes an obsession with him. Partial fulfilment of the prophecy

convinces him that all will be fulfilled. The belief that the veil over the future has been lifted for him gives him the recklessness of one bound in the knots of fate. So often, the thought that the soul is in a trap, playing out something planned of old, makes man take the frantic way, when the smallest belief in life would lead to peace. This thought passes through his mind. Then fear that it is all a contriving of the devils makes him put it manfully from his mind. The talk about the Cawdor whose place he holds is a thrust to him. That Cawdor was a traitor who has been put to death for treachery. The king had an "absolute trust" in him; but there is no judging by appearances. This glimpse of the ugliness of treachery makes Macbeth for an instant free of all temptation to it. Then a word stabs him again to the knowledge that if he take no step the king's young son will be king after Duncan. Why should the boy rule? From this point he goes forward, full of all the devils of indecision, but inclining towards righteousness, till his wife, girding

and railing at him with definite aim while all his powers are in mutiny, drives him to the act of murder.

The story of the double treachery of the killing of a king, who is also a guest, is so written that we do not feel horror so much as an unbearable pity for Macbeth's mind. The horror is felt later, when it is made plain that the treachery does not end with that old man on the bed, but proceeds in a spreading growth of murder till the man who fought so knightly at Fife is the haunted awful figure who goes ghastly, killing men, women and little children, till Scotland is like a grave. At the end, the "worthy gentleman," "noble Macbeth," having fallen from depth to depth of degradation, is old, hag-haunted, sick at heart, and weary. He has no friends. He knows himself silently cursed by every one in his kingdom. His queen is haunted. There is a curse upon the pair of them. The birds of murder have come to roost. All that supports him is his trust in his reading of the words of the hags. He knows himself secure.

"And you all know security
Is mortal's chiefest enemy."

He has supped full with horrors. His bloody base mind is all a blur with gore. But he is resolute in evil still. At the end he sees too late that he has been tricked by—

"the equivocation of the fiend
That lies like truth."

His queen has killed herself. All the welter of murder has been useless. All that he has done is to damn his soul through the centuries during which the line of Banquo will reign. He dies with a courage that is half fury against the fate that has tricked him.

No play contains greater poetry. There is nothing more intense. The mind of the man was in the kingdom of vision, hearing a new speech and seeing what worldly beings do not see, the rush of the powers, and the fury of elemental passions. No play is so full of an unspeakable splendour of vision—

"his virtues
Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued."

"And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air."

"Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air, strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible."

"In the great hand of God I stand."

"A falcon towering in her pride of place
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and killed.
And Duncan's horses—a thing most strange and certain—
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
War with mankind.
'Tis said they eat each other."

"the time has been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die."

All the splendours and powers of this great play have been praised and re-praised. Noble inventions, like the knocking on the door and the mutterings of the hags, have thrilled thousands. One, not less noble, is less noticed. It is in Act IV, sc. i, Macbeth has just questioned the hags for the last time. He calls in Lennox, with the words—

"I did hear
The galloping of horse: who was't came by?"

It was the galloping of messengers with the news that Macduff, who is to be the cause of his ruin, has fled to England. An echo of the galloping stays in the brain, as though the hoofs of some horse rode the night, carrying away Macbeth's luck for ever.

Antony and Cleopatra.

Written. 1607–8 (?)

Published, in the folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The life of Antonius in Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives.*

The Fable. Antony, entangled by the wiles of Cleopatra, shakes himself free so that he may attend to the conduct of the world. He makes a pact with the young Cæsar, by marrying Cæsar's sister Octavia. Soon afterwards, being

tempted from his wife by Cleopatra, he falls into wars with Cæsar. Being unhappy in his fortune and deserted by his friends, he kills himself. Cleopatra having lost her lover, and fearing to be led in triumph by Cæsar, also kills herself.

In this most noble play, Shakespeare applies to a great subject his constant idea, that tragedy springs from the treachery caused by some obsession.

> "Strange it is
> That nature must compel us to lament
> Our most persisted deeds."

It cannot be said that the play is greater than the other plays of this period. It can be said that it is on a greater scale than any other play. The scene is the Roman world. The men engaged are struggling for the control of all the power of the world. The private action is played out before a grand public setting. The wisdom and the beauty of the poetry answer the greatness of the subject.

Shakespeare's later tragedies, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *Othello*, and this play differ from some of the early tragedies in that the subject

is not the man of intellect, hounded down by the man of affairs, as in *Richard II*, *Richard III*, and *Henry IV*, but the man of large and generous nature hounded down by the man of intellect. In all four plays the destruction of the principal character is brought about partly by a blindness in a noble nature, but very largely by a cool, resolute, astute soul who can and does take advantage of the blindness. Edmund, the tribunes, Iago, and (in this play) Octavius Cæsar are such souls. All of them profit by the soul they help to destroy. They leave upon the mind the impression that they have a tact for the gaining of profit from human frailty. All of them show the basest ingratitude under a colourable cloak of human excuse.

The obsession of lust is illustrated in half-a-dozen of Shakespeare's plays; but in none of them so fully as here. The results of that obsession in treachery and tragedy brim the great play. Antony is drunken to destruction with a woman like a raging thirst. A fine stroke in the creation of the

play sweeps him clear of her and offers him a way of life. He uses the moment to get so far from her that his return to her is a deed of triple treachery to his wife, to Cæsar, and to his country. His intoxication with the woman degrades him to the condition of blindness in which the woman-drunken staggers. It is a part of all drunkenness that the drunkard thinks himself a king, though he looks and is a sot. Shakespeare's marvellous illustration of this blindness (in the third act) is seldom praised as it should be. Antony, crushingly defeated, owing to the treachery of all debauched natures, calls upon Octavius to meet him in single combat.

"men's judgments are
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them,
To suffer all alike."

"when we in our viciousness grow hard
O misery on 't—the wise gods seel our eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at 's while we strut
To our confusion."

The cruel bungling suicide which leaves him lingering in dishonour is one of the saddest things in the plays. This was Antony who ruled once, this mutterer dying, whom no one loves enough to kill. Once before, in Shakespeare's vision, he came near death, in the proud scene in the senate house, before Cæsar's murderers. He was very great and noble then. Now

> "The star is fall'n
> And time is at his period."

"The god Hercules, whom Antony loved,"

has moved away with his hautboys and all comes to dust again.

The minds of most writers would have been exhausted after the creation of four such acts. The splendour of Shakespeare's intellectual energy makes the last act as bright a torch of beauty as the others. The cry—

> "We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
> Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,

And make Death proud to take us . . .
. . . . we have no friend
But resolution and the briefest end,"

begins a song of the welcoming of death, unlike anything in the plays. Shakespeare seldom allows a woman a great, tragical scene. Cleopatra is the only Shakespearean woman who dies heroically upon the stage. Her death scene is not the greatest, nor the most terrible, but it is the most beautiful scene in all the tragedies. The words—

"Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,
And we are for the dark,"

and those most marvellous words, written at one golden time, in a gush of the spirit, when the man must have been trembling—

"O eastern star!
Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?"

are among the most beautiful things ever written by man.

Coriolanus.

Written. 1608 (?)
Published. 1623.

Source of the Plot. The life of Coriolanus in Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives.*

The Fable. Marcius, a noble Roman, of an excessive pride, bitterly opposes the rabble.

In the war against the Volscians he bears himself so nobly that he wins the title of Coriolanus. On his return from the wars he seeks the Consulship, woos the voices of the multitude, is accepted, and then cast by them. For his angry comment on their behaviour the tribunes contrive his banishment from the ctiy.

Being banished, he makes league with the Volscians. He takes command in the Volscian army and invades Roman territory.

Coming as a conqueror to the walls of Rome, his mother and wife persuade him to spare the city. He causes the Volscians to make peace. The Volscians return home dissatisfied.

On his return to the Volscian territory Coriolanus is impeached as a traitor, and stabbed to death by conspirators.

Shakespeare's tragical characters are all destroyed by the excess of some trait in them, whether good or ill matters nothing. Nature cares for type, not for the excessive. Sooner or later she checks the excessive so that the type may be maintained. She is stronger than the excessive, though she may be baser. To Nature, progress, though it

be infinitesimal, must be a progress of the whole mass, not a sudden darting out of one quality or one member.

Timon of Athens is betrayed by an excessive generosity. Coriolanus is betrayed by an excessive contempt for the multitude. He is one born into a high tradition of life. He has the courage, the skill in arms, and the talent for affairs that come with high birth in the manly races. He has also the faith in tradition that makes an unlettered upper class narrow and obstructionist. Like the rich in France before the Revolution, he despises the poor. He denies them the right to complain of their hunger. Rather than grant them that right, or the means of urging redress, he would take a short way with them, as was practised here, at Manchester and elsewhere.

"Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,
And let me use my sword, I'ld make a quarry
With thousands of these quarter'd slaves, as high
As I could pick my lance."

Like all conservative, aristocratic men, he sees in the first granting of political power to the people the beginning of revolution.

"It will in time
Win power upon and throw forth greater themes
For insurrection's arguing."

He regards the people as a necessary, evil-smelling, many-headed beast, good enough, under the leadership of men like himself, to make inferior troops to be spent as the State pleases. It is possible that Napoleon and Bismarck looked upon the mob with similar scorn. The ideas are those of an absolute monarch or super-man. The country squire holds those ideas, though want of power and want of intellect combine to keep him from applying them. The sincerity of the ideas is tested from time to time, in free countries, by general elections.

Much of the pride of Coriolanus springs from a sense of his superiority to others in the gifts of fortune. Much of it comes from the knowledge that he is superior in himself.

Leading, as becomes his birth, in the war against the Volscians he shows himself so much superior to others that the campaign is his triumph. He is "the man" whom Napoleon counted "everything in war." The knowledge of his merit is so bright within himself that he is unable to see that it is less bright in others. He is willing to become the head of the State if the post may be given to him as a right due to merit, not as a favour begged. He has no lust for power. But knowing himself to be the best man in Rome, he thinks that his merit is sufficiently great to excuse him from the indignity of sueing for it. The laws of free countries prescribe that he who wishes to be elected must appeal to the electors whether he love them or loathe them. Instead of appealing to them, Coriolanus insults them with such arrogance that they drive him from the city.

He fails as a traitor, because he is too noble to be fiercely revengeful. A lesser man, a Richard III, or an Iago, would have exacted

a bloody toll from Rome. Coriolanus cannot bring himself to be stern, in the presence of his old mother and his wife. Something generous and truly aristocratic in him makes him a second time a traitor, this time to his hosts the Volscians. He spares Rome by the sacrifice of those who have given him a shelter and a welcome. Treachery (even from a noble motive) is never forgiven in these plays. It is always avenged, seldom mercifully. The Volscians avenge themselves on Coriolanus by an act of treachery that brings the noble heart under the foot of the traitor.

Coriolanus is one of the greatest of Shakespeare's creations. Much of the glory of the creation is due to Plutarch. There can be no great art without great fable. Great art can only exist where great men brood intensely on something upon which all men brood a little. Without a popular body of fable there can be no unselfish art in any country. Shakespeare's art was selfish till he turned to the great tales in the four most

popular books of his time, Holinshed, North's Plutarch, Cinthio, and De Belleforest. Since the newspaper became powerful, topic has supplanted fable, and subject comes to the artist untrimmed and unlit by the vitality of many minds. In reading *Coriolanus* and the other plays of the great period a man feels that Shakespeare fed his fire with all that was passionate in the thought about him. He appears to be his age focussed. The great man now stands outside his age, like Timon.

Coriolanus is a play of the clash of the aristocratic temper with the world. It contains most of the few speeches in Shakespeare which ring with what seems like a personal bitterness. Hatred of the flunkey mind, and of the servile, insolent mob mind, "false as water," appears in half-a-dozen passages. Some of these passages are ironic inventions, not prompted by Plutarch. The great mind, brooding on the many forms of treachery, found nothing more treacherous than the mob, and nothing more dog-like, for good or evil, than the servant.

Greatness is sometimes shown in very little things. Few things in Shakespeare show better the fulness of his happy power than the following—

(*Corioli. Enter certain Romans with spoils.*)
1st Roman. This will I carry to Rome.
2nd Roman. And I this.
3rd Roman. A murrain on't. I took this for silver.

Timon of Athens.

Written. 1606–8 (?)
Published. 1623.
Source of the Plot. William Paynter's *Palace of Pleasure.* Plutarch's *Life of Antonius.* Lucian's *Dialogue.*
The Fable. Timon of Athens, a wealthy, over-generous man, gives to his friends so lavishly that he ruins himself. He finds none grateful for his bounty. In his ruin all his friends desert him. None of them will lend to him or help him. He falls into a loathing of the world and retires to die alone. Alcibiades of Athens, finding a like ingratitude in the State, openly makes war upon it, reduces it to his own terms, and rules it. He finds Timon dead.

Timon of Athens is a play of mixed authorship. Shakespeare's share in it is large and unmistakable; but much of it was written by an unknown poet of whom we can decipher this, that he was a man of genius, a skilled writer for the stage, and of a marked

personality. It cannot now be known how the collaboration was arranged. Either the unknown collaborated with Shakespeare, or the unknown wrote the play and Shakespeare revised it.

Ingratitude is one of the commonest forms of treachery. It is the form that leads most quickly to the putting back of the world, because it destroys generosity of mind. It creates in man the bitter and destructive quality of misanthropy, or a destroying passion of revenge. In this play the two authors show the different ways in which the human mind may be turned to those bitter passions.

Apemantus is currish, because others are not. He has wit without charity. Alcibiades makes war on his city because others have not the rough-and-ready large practical justice of men used to knocks. He has a large good humour without idealism. Timon, the great-natured, truly generous man, whose mind is as beneficial as the sun, cannot be currish, nor stoop to the baseness of revenge. Finding

men base, he removes himself from them, and ministers with bitter contempt to the baseness that infects them. The flaming out of his anger against whatever is parasitic in life makes the action of the last two acts. The exhibition of the baseness of parasites and of the wrath of a noble mind embittered, is contrived, varied and heightened with intense dramatic energy. The character of Flavius, Timon's steward, his only friend, shows again, as in so many of the plays, Shakespeare's deep sense of the noble generosity in faithful service.

Some think the play gloomy, others that it is autobiography. Shakespeare's completed work is never gloomy. A great mind working with such a glory of energy cannot be gloomy. This generation is gloomy and unimaginative in its conception of art. Shakespeare, reading the story of Timon, saw in him an image of tragic destiny that would flood the heart of even an ingrate with pity. Great poets have something more difficult and more noble to do than to pin their hearts

on their sleeves for daws to peck at. Shakespeare wrought the figure of Timon with as grave justice as he wrought Alcibiades. He wrought both from something feeling within himself, as he wrought Cleopatra, and Macbeth, and Sir Toby Belch. They are as much autobiographical, and as little, as the hundred other passionate moods that built up the system of his soul.

The poetry of the play is that of the great late manner—

> "will these moss'd trees,
> That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,
> And skip when thou point'st out?"

> "Come not to me again: but say to Athens,
> Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
> Upon the beached verge of the salt flood:
> Who, once a day with his embossed froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover."

The final speech, spoken by Alcibiades after he has read the epitaph, with which Timon goes down to death, like some hurt thing shrinking even from the thought of

passers, is one of the most lovely examples of the power and variety of blank verse as a form of dramatic speech.

Alcib. (reading) *Pass by and curse thy fill; but pass, and stay not here thy gait.*

These well express in thee thy latter spirits:
Though thou abhorr'dst in us our human griefs,
Scorned'st our brain's flow and those our droplets which
From niggard nature fall, yet rich conceit
Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye
On thy low grave, on faults forgiven. Dead
Is noble Timon: of whose memory
Hereafter more. Bring me into your city,
And I will use the olive with my sword,
Make war breed peace, make peace stint war, make each
Prescribe to other as each other's leech.
Let our drums strike.

Pericles, Prince of Tyre

Written. 1607–8 (?)
Published. 1608.
Source of the Plot. The plot is taken from an English prose

version of a Latin translation of a fifth century Greek romance. This version was published by Lawrence Twine, in the year 1576, under the name of *The Patterne of Paynfull Adventures* (etc., etc.). It was reprinted in 1607. An adaptation from the Latin story was made by John Gower for the eighth book of his *Confessio Amantis*. This adaptation was known to the authors of the play.

The Fable. Act I. Pericles, Prince of Tyre, comes to Antioch to guess a riddle propounded by the King. If he guess rightly, he will be rewarded by the hand of the Princess in marriage. If he guess wrongly, he will be put to death. The riddle teaches him that the Princess is living incestuously with her father. He flies from Antioch to Tyre, and there takes ship to avoid the King's vengeance. Coming to Tarsus he relieves a famine by gifts of corn.

Act II. He is wrecked near Pentapolis, recovers his armour, goes jousting at the King's court, wins the King's daughter Thaisa, and marries her.

Act III. While bound for Tyre, Thaisa gives birth to a daughter, dies, and is thrown overboard. The body drifts ashore at Ephesus, and is restored to life by a physician. Thaisa, thinking Pericles dead, becomes a votaress at Diana's temple. Pericles leaves Marina, the newly born babe, in the care of the King and Queen of Tarsus. He then returns to Tyre.

Act IV. The years pass. Marina grows up to such beauty and charm that she passes the Queen of Tarsus' own daughter. The Queen, deeply jealous for her own child, hires a murderer to kill Marina. Pirates surprise him in the act and carry off Marina to a brothel in Mitylene, from which she escapes. She becomes a singer and musician.

Act V. Pericles, wandering, by sea, to Mitylene, in great melancholy for the loss of wife and child, hears Marina sing. He learns that she is his daughter. The goddess Diana

bids him go to her temple at Ephesus. He goes, and finds Thaisa. The play ends happily with the reuniting of the family.

The acts are opened by rhyming prologues designed to be spoken by John Gower. The prologues to each of the three first acts are followed by Dumb Shows, an invention of the theatre to explain those things not easily to be shown in action. The prologues, the invention of the dumb shows, and the first two acts, are not by Shakespeare. They are like the poetical work of George Wilkins, who published a prose romance of *The Painfull Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre* in the year 1608, probably after the play had been produced.

The construction of the last three acts makes it likely that the play (in its original state) was by the constructor of the first two acts. It is not known how it came to pass that Shakespeare took the play in hand. From the comparative feebleness of his work upon it, it may be judged that it was not a labour of love. The impression given is that

nothing in the piece is wrought with more than the mechanical power of the great mind, that Shakespeare was not deeply interested in the play, but that he re-wrote the last three acts so that his company might play the piece and make money by it. The play has often succeeded on the stage, and the knowledge that it would succeed may have weighed with the manager of a theatre on which many depended for bread.

There is little that is precious in the play. The scenes in the brothel at Mitylene (in Act IV) have power. Many find their unpleasantness an excuse for saying that Shakespeare never wrote them. They are certainly by Shakespeare. Cant would always persuade itself that the power to see clearly ought not to be turned upon evil. Those who can read —

Bawd. . . they are so pitifully sodden.
Pandar. . . The poor Transylvanian is dead, that lay with the little baggage.
Boult. Ay . . . she made him roast-meat for worms—

with disgust at Shakespeare's foulness, yet

without horror of heart that the evil still goes on among human beings, must be strangely made. These scenes, the very vigorous sea scenes, including the account of the storm at sea, put into the mouth of Marina—

"My father, as nurse said, did never fear,
But cried 'Good seamen!' to the sailors, galling
His kingly hands, haling ropes;
And, clasping to the mast, endured a sea
That almost burst the deck. . . .
Never was waves nor wind more violent:
And from the ladder-tackle washes off
A canvas-climber. 'Ha,' says one, 'wilt out?'
And with a dropping industry they skip
From stem to stern; the boatswain whistles, and
The master calls and trebles their confusion"—

and the scene in which Cerimon, the man withdrawn from the world to study the bettering of man, revives the body of Thaisa, are the most lovely things in the play.

Cymbeline.

Written. (?)

Published, in the folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. Holinshed's *Chronicles* tell of Cymbeline and the Roman invasion. A story in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (giorn. 2, nov. ix.) retold in English in Kinde Kit's *Westward for Smelts,* and popular in many forms and many literatures, tells of the woman falsely accused of adultery.

The Fable. Cymbeline, King of Britain, has lost his two sons. His only remaining child, a daughter named Imogen, is married to Posthumus. His second wife, a cruel and scheming woman, plots to destroy Posthumus so that her son, the boorish Cloten, may marry Imogen.

Posthumus in Rome wagers with Iachimo that Imogen is of an incomparable chastity. Iachimo comes to England, and by a trick obtains evidence that convinces Posthumus that Imogen is unchaste. Imogen, cast off by her husband, comes to the mountains where Belarius rears Cymbeline's two lost sons. Cloten, pursuing her, is killed by one of the sons.

The Romans land to exact tribute. The valour of Belarius and the two boys obtains a British victory. The Romans are vanquished. Cymbeline's queen kills herself. Posthumus is taught that Iachimo deceived him. Imogen is restored to him. The lost sons are restored to Cymbeline. Prophecy is fulfilled and pardon given. All ends happily.

It seems possible that Cymbeline was begun as a tragedy during the great mood of tragical creation, then laid aside unfinished, from some failure in the vision, or change in

the creative mood, and brought to an end later in a new spirit, perhaps in another place, in the country, away from the life which makes writing alive. It is the least perfect of the later plays. The least soft of Shakespeare's critics calls it "unresisting imbecility." It is perhaps the first composed of the romantic plays with which Shakespeare ended his life's work.

Though the writing is so careless and the construction so loose that no one can think of it as a finished play, it has dramatic scenes, one faultless lyric, and many marks of beauty. It deals with the Shakespearean subject of craft working upon a want of faith for personal ends, and being defeated, when almost successful, by something simple and instinctive in human nature. It is thus not unlike *Othello;* but in *Othello* the subject is simple, and the treatment purely tragic. In *Cymbeline* the subject is only partly extricated, and the treatment is coloured with romance, with that strange, touching, very Shakespearean romance, of the thing long lost beautifully

recovered before the end, so that the last years of the chief man in the play may be happy and complete. The end of life would be as happy as the beginning if the dead might be given back to us. Shakespeare had lost a child.

There can be no doubt that when the play was first conceived, the craft of the queen, working upon the insufficient faith of Cymbeline, was designed to be as important to the action as the craft of Iachimo working upon the insufficient faith of Posthumus. This was never wrought out. The play advances and halts. As in all unfinished works of art one sees in it something fine trying to get free but failing.

The lyric "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" is the most lovely thing in the play. The most powerful moment is that which exposes the poisoning of a generous mind by false report. Posthumus believes Iachimo's lie and breaks out railing against women.

"For there's no motion
That tends to vice in man but I affirm
It is the woman's part."

Noble instants are marked in the lines—

"Be not, as in our fangled world, a garment
Nobler than that it covers,"

and in the symbol of the eagle—

"the Roman eagle,
From south to west on wing soaring aloft,
Lessen'd herself and in the beams o' the sun
So vanished."

The Winter's Tale.

Written. 1610–11.

Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. The story appears in Robert Greene's romance of *Pandosto.* Shakespeare greatly improves the fable by completing it. Greene ends it. Greene makes the story an accident with an unhappy end. Shakespeare makes it a vision of the working of fate with the tools of human passion.

The Fable. Leontes, King of Sicilia, suspecting that his wife Hermione is guilty of adultery with Polixenes, King of Bohemia, tries her on that count. He causes her daughter to be carried to a desert place and there exposed.

The oracle of Apollo declares to him that Hermione is innocent, that he himself is a jealous tyrant, and that he

will die without an heir should he fail to recover the daughter lost. The truth of the oracle is confirmed by the (apparent) death of Hermione and the real death of Mamillius, his son. Repenting bitterly of his obsession of jealousy he goes into mourning.

The little daughter is found by country people who nourish and cherish her. She grows up to beautiful and gracious girlhood. Florizel, the son of Polixenes, falls in love with her, and seeks to marry her without his father's knowledge. Being discovered by Polixenes, he flies with her to the sea. Taking ship, the couple come to Leontes' court, where it is proved that the girl is the lost princess. She is married to Florizel. Leontes is reconciled to Polixenes. Hermione completes the general happiness by rejoining the husband who has so long mourned her.

Dr. Simon Forman, the first critic of this play, made note to "remember" two things in it, "how he sent to the orakell of Appollo," and "also the rog that cam in all tottered like Coll Pipci." He drew from it this moral lesson, that one should "Beware of trustinge feined beggars or fawninge fellouse."

The moral lesson is still of value to the world, and it is most certainly one which Shakespeare strove to impress. Shakespeare's mind was always brooding on the working of fate. He was always watching the results of some obsession upon an individual and the

people connected with him. He saw that a blindness falling upon a person suddenly, for no apparent reason, except that something strikes the something not quite sound in the nature, has the power to alter life violently. It was his belief that life must not be altered violently. Life is a thing of infinitely gradual growth, that would perfect itself if the blindness could be kept away. Any deceiving thing, like a passion or a feigned beggar, is a cause of the putting back of life, indefinitely. In this play, he followed his usual practice, of showing the results of a human blindness upon human destiny. The greater plays are studies of treachery and self-betrayal. This play is a study of deceit and self-deception. Leontes is deceived by his obsession, Polixenes by his son, the country man by Autolycus, life, throughout, by art. In the last great scene, life is mistaken for art. In the first great scene a true friendship is mistaken for a false love.

It may be called the gentlest of Shakespeare's plays. It is done with a tenderer

hand than the other works. The name, *A Winter's Tale*, is taken from a scene in the second act. Hermione sits down with her son, by the winter fire, to listen to his story. It is the last time she ever sees her son. He has hardly opened his lips when Leontes enters to accuse her of adultery. She is hurried off to prison, and Mamillius dies before the oracle's message comes to clear her. The sudden shocks and interruptions of life, which play so big a part in the action of these late romances, have full power here. The winter's tale is interrupted. The rest of the play results from the interruption. Much of it is very beautiful. To us, the wonderful thing is the strangeness of the tenderness which makes some scenes in the fifth act so passionate with grief for old injustice done to the dead. The cry of Leontes remembering the wronged dead woman's eyes—

> "Stars, stars,
> And all eyes else dead coals,"

is haunting and heart-breaking. All his

longing of remorse gives to the last great scene, before the supposed statue, an intensity of beauty hardly endurable.

The passion of remorse is a romantic, not a tragic passion. It is the mood which follows the tragic mood. Shakespeare's creative life is like a Shakespearean play. It ends with an easing of the strain and a making of peace.

It is said that an old horse near to death turns towards the pastures where he was foaled. It is true of human beings. Man wanders home to the fields which bred him. A part of the romance of this poem is the turning back of the poet's mind to the Cotswold country, of which he sang so magically, in his first play, sixteen or eighteen years before. There are fine scenes of shepherds at home, among the sheep bells and clean wind. There is a very lovely talk of flowers—

" daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,

But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength."

To Shakespeare, the magically happy man, the going back to them must have been a time for thanksgiving. But to the supremely happy man all times are times of thanksgiving, deep, tranquil and abundant, for the delight, the majesty and the beauty of the fulness of the rolling world.

The Tempest.

Written. 1610–11.

Published, in the folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. It is likely that many sources contributed to the making of this plot. If Shakespeare took the fable from a single source, that source is not now known. He may have taken suggestions for it from the following books: —

1st. From a little collection of novels by Antonio de Eslava, a Spanish writer, whose book, *Noches de Invierno,* was published in Barcelona in 1609. Three tales in this collection seem to have given hints for the play. The fourth chapter, about "The Art Magic of King Dardano," helped him more than the others. Whether the title of the book suggested the title of *A Winter's Tale* is not known.

2nd. From a German play, *Die Schöne Sidea*, by a Nuremberg dramatist, named Jacob Ayrer.

3rd. From the tracts relating to the discovery of the Bermuda Islands in 1609. Of the known tracts, *A Discovery of the Bermuda Islands*, by Sylvester Jourdain, gave Shakespeare the most hints.

Several other books may have suggested lines and passages.

The Fable. Prospero, Duke of Milan, having been driven from his dukedom by Antonio his brother, flies to sea with his daughter Miranda, lands on an island, and there lives, served by two creatures, one an airy spirit, the other a loutish monster.

By art magic, he brings to the island his usurping brother and the king and heir of Naples. Miranda falls in love with the heir of Naples. Prospero dismisses his spirits, reconciles himself with his brother, and plans to sail at once for Milan.

In his play, as in the two other original romantic plays, Shakespeare follows the workings of a treacherous act from its performance to the repentance of the sinner and the granting of the victim's forgiveness. In the great plays the victim dies and the sinner does not repent. Presently the wheel comes full circle, and a justice from outside life smites him dead. In these plays the betrayed live to forgive the traitors —

"Though with their high wrongs I am struck
to the quick,
Yet, with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance: they being
penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further."

In this play, as in the other two and in *Pericles*, much is made of the chances and accidents of life, and of the sudden changes of worldly circumstance due to them. In this play, for the first and last time, Shakespeare treats of the power of the resolved imagination to command the brutish, the base, the noble and the spiritual for wise human ends.

It is easy to interpret the play as allegory. Youth in this country has reason to regard allegory as a clumsy man's way of introducing Sunday on a week-day. It is so seldom successful that it may be called the literary method of creative minds below the first rank. Shakespeare's method was never allegorical. The *Tempest* is perhaps no more allegorical

than any other good romance. But the thought of it is so clear that the first impression given is that it is thin. It is the study of a man of intellect, who has been forced from power by a treacherous brother. Living alone with his bright, unspoiled daughter, he attains, by intellectual labour, to a power over destiny. Like the wise man of the proverb, he learns to master his stars. He uses this power nobly to put an end to ancient hatred and old injustice.

The minor vision of the play is a study, often very amusing, but deeply earnest, of the coming of the fifth part civilised to the mostly brutal. In Shakespeare's time, men like the quite thoughtless and callous Stephano and Trinculo, the "sea-dogs" who manned our ships, and of whom Raleigh wrote that it was an offence to God to minister oaths to the generality of them, were "spreading civilisation" in various parts of the world. Shakespeare, looking at them gravely, saw them to be, perhaps, more dangerous to the needs of life, to wisdom, and to unlit animal

strength than the base Sebastian and the treacherous Antonio.

The exquisite lyrics, and the masque of the goddesses, show that the taste of the audience of 1610–11 needed to be tickled. Times had changed since the lion-like and ramping days, eighteen years before, when "Jeronimy" was a new word, and Tamora a serious invention. The man who had changed the times was thinking, like Prospero, that he had "got his dukedom," and that now, having "pardoned the deceiver," he might go to Stratford to enjoy it.

King Henry VIII, or *All is True.*

Written. 1611–13 (?)

Produced. (?)

Published, in the first folio, 1623.

Source of the Plot. Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Hall's *Chronicles*. Fox's *Book of Martyrs*.

The Fable. Act I. Two of the scenes in this act are by Shakespeare. In the first, Cardinal Wolsey contrives the attainting of his enemy, the Duke of Buckingham. In the other he procures to bring Queen Katharine into disfavour.

Act II. In this act, Buckingham is beheaded, the King shows favour to Anne Bullen, and Queen Katharine is brought to trial. It is hard to believe that Shakespeare

wrote any part of this act. He is often credited with the third scene, apparently on the ground that though it is bad it is still too good to be by Bacon.

Act III. In this act, the King shows Wolsey that he has discovered his plottings. About half of the second scene (all the masculine part of it) is by Shakespeare. The rest (very beautiful) is by Fletcher.

Act IV. Anne Bullen is crowned. Wolsey dies. Queen Katharine dies. None of this act is by Shakespeare.

Act V. Cranmer escapes from his enemies in time to be godfather at the christening of Anne Bullen's daughter Elisabeth. If any of this act be by Shakespeare it can only be the first scene.

Little of this play is by Shakespeare. The greater part of it is by John Fletcher. Some scenes bear the marks of a third hand, like that of Philip Massinger. The play reads as though the two lesser poets had worked from a scenario of Shakespeare's less complete than the draft of *Troilus and Cressida*. It is certain that they received no hint of the lines on which Shakespeare meant to proceed after the end of Act III. Not knowing what to do, they patched up a piece without any central tragical idea, and hid their want of thought with much effective theatrical invention, pageants, a trial, a coronation, a christening, etc., and with bright, facile, vinous dialogue,

of the kind that will hold an uncritical audience. The play, when done, was mounted with extreme splendour at the Globe Theatre. Wadding from the cannons discharged in the first act set fire to the theatre, and burned it to the ground, June 29, 1613.

Shakespeare's dramatic intention is indicated in the scenes written by him. Knowing his practice, and having before us Holinshed, his authority, it is easy to sketch out the kind of play that he would have written by himself. Wolsey, eaten up by his obsession for worldly power, betraying Buckingham to his fall, breaking the power of the Queen, and ruling England, would have filled the first two acts. The third act would have told (much more subtly than Fletcher has told) of his downfall. Fletcher attributes the downfall to the chance discovery of his attempt to thwart the king's marriage with Anne Bullen. That discovery would have been put to full dramatic use by Shakespeare; but it would have been represented as something working from beyond the grave, the result of many unjust

acts that have cried to God for justice till God hears. The last acts would have exposed other sides of Wolsey's character. The play would have been a fuller, nobler work than *Richard II*, and of an ampler canvas than *Timon*. Shakespeare's share in the play as we have it is all noble work. Wolsey, Katharine and the King are drawn with the great, sharp, ample line of a master. The difference between genius and supreme genius is shown very clearly in the first act, where a great work, greatly begun, with the masterly power of exposition that makes Shakespeare's first acts like daybreaks, is ended by another spirit, without vision, but with a tremendous sense of Vanity Fair.

WORK ATTRIBUTED TO SHAKESPEARE

A play called *Cardenno*, or *Cardenna*, was acted at Court by Shakespeare's company in 1613. It is thought that this play was the *History of Cardenio*, described as "by Fletcher and Shakespeare," which was licensed for

publication in 1653 but never published. The play is now lost. It was attributed to Fletcher and Shakespeare on very poor authority.

Arden of Feversham is a domestic tragedy founded on a story told by Holinshed. It was published anonymously in 1592. It is held by some to be an early work of Shakespeare's, on the ground that no other known poet, then living, could have written it. It is a strong play, but it is the work of a joyless mind. It bears no single trace of Shakespeare's mind. It could not have been written by him at any stage in his career.

Edward III is an historical chronicle play by at least two unknown hands. It was published anonymously in 1596. Some think that part of Act I and the whole of Act II (dealing with the King's obsession of passion for the Countess of Salisbury) were by Shakespeare, on the grounds that the writing is too good to be by anybody else then living, and that the unknown author makes use of

a line and a phrase which occur in the genuine sonnets of Shakespeare. The scenes attributed to Shakespeare contain several beautiful lines in something of the Shakespearean manner. The construction of the scenes, and their relation to the rest of the play is un-Shakespearean. It is unlikely that Shakespeare wrote them.

The Spanish Tragedy, a play by Thomas Kyd, published in 1592 and reprinted with many additions ten years later, contains in the additions several magnificent scenes of the passion of grief raised to madness. Some think that Ben Jonson wrote these scenes; others, that they are too good to be by any one but Shakespeare. They are not like Shakespeare's work.

The Two Noble Kinsmen, a romantic tragedy on the subject of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, was first published in 1634. It was described on the title-page as the joint work of Fletcher and Shakespeare. Shakespeare's hand is plainly marked upon the play; but it seems likely that most of the scenes usually

credited to him are by Massinger. Few can have ears dull enough to credit Shakespeare with all the scenes that are plainly not by Fletcher.

About a dozen other plays and parts of plays have been attributed to Shakespeare, either by lying publishers, anxious to make money, or by foolish critics eager to make a noise. "Evil men understand not judgment: and he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." There is not a glimmer of evidence in any line or scene to show that Shakespeare had a hand in any of them.

THE POEMS

Venus and Adonis.—This poem was published in 1593 with a dedication to the Earl of Southampton, then a youth. In the dedication Shakespeare speaks of the poem as "the first heire of my invention," from which some conclude that it was the first poem ever made public by him.

Though it may be his earliest poem, the thought expressed by it is the thought expressed in the greatest of the plays, that evil comes of obsession.

Venus, a lustful woman, pursuing her opposite, a chaste youth, comes to misery. Adonis, a chaste youth, fleeing from her, comes to death.

The poem is beautiful and wild blooded. It is fierce with the excelling animal zest of something young and untainted.

"The sun ariseth in his majesty
Who doth the world so gloriously behold,
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnish'd
gold."

It is full of the images of delicate quick-blooded things going swiftly and lustily from the boiling of the April in them.

The Rape of Lucrece.—This poem was published in 1594, with a dedication to the Earl of Southampton. Like so many of the works of Shakespeare, it describes at length

the prompting, acting, and results of a treachery inspired by an obsession. Tarquin, hearing of Lucrece's chastity, longs to attempt her. Coming stealthily to her home, in her lord's absence, he foully ravishes her. She kills herself and he is banished from Rome. The subject is not unlike that of *Venus and Adonis*, with the sexes reversed. In both poems the subject is sexual obsession and its results.

Lucrece is a wiser and a finer poem than *Venus and Adonis*. It is constructed with the art of a man familiar with the theatre. The delaying of the great moments so as to heighten the expectation, is contrived with rapturous energy. The poem is heaped and overflowing with the abundance of imaginative power. The wealth of the young man's mind is poured out like life in June.

It is strange that both Lucrece and Hamlet, in their moments of distraction, turn to the image of Troy blazing with the punishment of treachery.

The Passionate Pilgrim.—This little collection of poems was published in 1599, under Shakespeare's name, by William Jaggard, a dishonest bookseller. It contains poems by Richard Barnfield, Bartholomew Griffin, Christopher Marlowe, and one or more unknown hands. It also contains two genuine Shakespearean sonnets, three more from the text of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and three (less certainly his) on the subject of *Venus and Adonis*, which have the ring of his freshest youthful manner. Whether any others in the collection be by Shakespeare can only be a matter of opinion. The nineteenth poem has a smack of his mind about it. If it be by him it must be his earliest extant work.

The Sonnets.—*Written* between 1592 and 1609. *Published* (piratically) 1609.

These personal poems have puzzled many readers. Many writers have tried to interpret them. Although their first editor tells us

that they are "serene, cleare, and elegantlie plaine (with) no intricate and cloudie stuffe to trouble and perplex the intellect," much good and bad brain work has been spent on them. Some have held that they are poetical exercises. Others find that they are confessions. Others wrest from dark lines dark meanings, till they have laid bare a story from them. Others interpret spiritually. Others find evidence in them that Shakespeare was guilty of an abnormal form of passion. The facts about them may be stated—

1. They are personal poems. Some of them are of great beauty; others are unsuccessful.

2. They were written in many moods. Some were written in a mood of the intensest tranquil ecstasy, others in a fit of earthly passion, others in a trivial mood.

3. They were written to more than one person. Many were written to an attractive, handsome, young, unmarried man, Shake-

speare's dear friend. Men with imagination enjoy sweeter and closer friendships than the many know. The many, mulish as ever, therefore imagine evil.

4. Some of the sonnets were written to a woman, of the kind described in two or three of the plays, viz. a black-haired, black-eyed, white-faced, witty wanton, false to her marriage vows and the cause of similar falseness in Shakespeare himself, and in his friend.

5. Many of them show that Shakespeare, loving this woman, against his better nature, was wilfully betrayed by her to all the devils of jealousy, craving and self-loathing, which follow the banner of lechery. Among the objects of the jealousy another poet figured.

No one knows who the friend, the lady and the rival poet were. The discovery of letters and manuscripts may some day remove the mystery. "Against that time, if ever that time come," men of intellect

would do well to accept the sonnets as beautiful poems, and try to write as good ones to their wives.

Beautiful as many of the sonnets are, they are less wonderful achievements and less important to the soul of man than the plays. Few people thought much of them until the degradation of the English theatre had hidden from English minds the greater glory of the creative system. That they are now widely read while the plays are seldom acted, is another proof that this age cares more for what was perishing and personal in Shakespeare than for that which went winging on, in the great light, surveying the eternal in man.

What Shakespeare thought of his perishing self is expressed in the noblest of the sonnets. Two syllables are missing from the second line.

"Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
( ) these rebel powers that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within and suffer
dearth,

Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine with selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there 's no more dying then."

The sonnets were piratically published in a quarto volume in 1609. At the end of the volume a narrative poem was printed, under the name *A Lover's Complaint.* It tells in the first person the story of a girl who has been seduced by a plausible villain. It is a work of Shakespeare's youth, fresh and

felicitous as youth's work often is, and very nearly as empty.

The Phœnix and the Turtle.—This strange, very beautiful poem was published in 1601 in an appendix to Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr, or Rosalin's Complaint*, to which several famous poets contributed. In dark and noble verse it describes a spiritual marriage, suddenly ended by death. It is too strange to be the fruit of a human sorrow. It is the work of a great mind trying to express in unusual symbols a thought too subtle and too intense to be expressed in any other way. Spiritual ecstasy is the only key to work of this kind. To the reader without that key it can only be so many strange words set in a noble rhythm for no apparent cause.

Poetry moves in many ways. It may glorify and make spiritual some action of man, or it may give to thoughts such life as thoughts can have, an intenser and stranger life than man knows, with forms that are

not human and a speech unintelligible to normal human moods. This poem gives to a flock of thoughts about the passing of truth and beauty the mystery and vitality of birds, who come from a far country, to fill the mind with their crying.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Shakespeare's plays were printed carelessly, often from imperfect, torn, ill-written or stolen copies. When printed, they were seldom corrected. When reprinted, the original errors were often made much worse. Thus, "he met the night-mare," or "a met the night-mare," in the original manuscript, was printed "a nellthu night more," and reprinted "anelthu night Moore." Those who lightly read the modern editions seldom know that years of mental toil went to the preparation of the texts so easily read to-day.

Many English minds have paid tribute to Shakespeare. Few of them deserve more

praise than the Cambridge Editors, whose six years of labour cleared the text of countless errors and corruptions. The correction of a corrupt text by collation and conjecture, is one of the most difficult and least amusing tasks that a fine mind can have. The Cambridge *Shakespeare*, the work of William George Clark and Dr. William Aldis Wright, gives a text not likely to be improved until the poet's corrected manuscripts are found.

The *Life of William Shakespeare* has been ably written by Dr. Sidney Lee, whose judgment equals his learning.

Some of the dramatic methods of Shakespeare have been nobly studied by Dr. A. C. Bradley in his *Shakespearean Tragedy*.

To these books and to the Shakespearean Essays in Mr. W. B. Yeats's *Ideas of Good and Evil*, I am deeply indebted, as all modern students of Shakespeare must be.

Our knowledge of Shakespeare is imperfect. It can only be increased by minute and patient study, by the rejection of surmise

about him, and by the constant public playing of his plays, in the Shakespearean manner, by actors who will neither mutilate nor distort what the great mind strove to make just.

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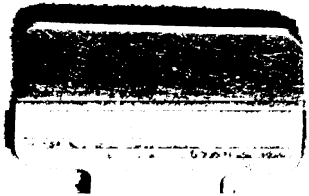
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